

Oslo on ice

Grace periods or not, the Israeli prime minister, much to his American 'hosts' disappointment, is not mellowing with time, writes Hoda Tawfik from Washington



Two Iraqi girls huddle in front of a house in Baghdad. Around 560,000 Iraqi children have died as a direct result of economic sanctions, according to the FAO mission which visited Iraq last year (photo: AFP)

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Museum robbery falls
TOURISM and antiquities police yesterday arrested a thief who stole 24 priceless items from the Egyptian Museum in mid-town Cairo. The stolen items, which are part of the treasure found in the tomb of the boy-king Tutankhamun, included a solid gold dagger, three gold bracelets inlaid with precious stones, rings and bronze statues of cats, reports *Mada El-Ghannam*.

The thief, apparently inspired by the film *How to Steal a Million*, was arrested as he left the museum. He confessed that he had entered the museum at 9.30am the day before his arrest. He later hid under one of the display cases on the second floor and stayed there until all the museum staff had left. He then emerged and wandered around the museum deciding what to take.

He entered the Tutankhamun room by climbing over the iron gate that closes off the room from the rest of the museum and opened three display cases with a screw driver, which he also used to close the cases. He then went to the coins' room, where he remained, with the stolen items concealed in his clothes, until the museum opened at 9am the following day.

Members of staff inspecting the collections discovered that items were missing and immediately called the police, who searched all those leaving the building. The thief was apprehended as he tried to leave the museum with the stolen items.

Writer dies

LATIFA El-Zayyat, one of Egypt's outstanding nationalist and literary figures, died yesterday at the age of 73 after a long illness.

El-Zayyat, born in the governorate of Damietta on 8 August 1923, was among the first Egyptian women to take a leading part in the struggle against British occupation. She was a leading member of the National Committee of Students and Workers formed in 1946 to struggle against the British. She studied at Cairo University's Faculty of Arts, and received her PhD in English literature in 1957. She later became a professor of English literature at Ain Shams University.

In addition to her political activism, which in the past decade focused on solidarity work with the Palestinians and opposition to Arab-Israeli normalisation, El-Zayyat was a novelist and a prominent writer. Shortly before her death, she won the state's merit award for literature.

Morocco vote
MOROCCANS will vote tomorrow, Friday, in a referendum expected to give overwhelming approval to a plan which will set up a second house of parliament in their country and could theoretically lead to the election of an opposition government for the first time.

The proposal, announced by King Hassan II last month, has produced a mixed reaction from the four leading opposition parties. Three affirmed their agreement to the proposal, while the fourth, a more leftist party, called for voters to boycott the referendum.

INSIDE

Ibrahim Nafie:
Sum greater than
difference.....p.10
Awad El-Mort.....p.3
Mahdi Nogay.....p.11
Salama A. Salama.....p.11
Mohammed Sid-Ahmed.....p.10
Gamil Matar.....p.4
Odeh.....p.11
El-Ghazali Herb.....p.11
Muataza Kamel.....p.11
El-Sayed.....p.11
M. Shafiq Gader.....p.8
Muhammad Alafiqi.....p.6
General Mikhael.....p.7
David Elsheh.....p.7
A right of
lonely hunting.....p.12
Nehad Sehadeh.....p.13
Banging at the gates.....p.12
At the crossroads of peace.....p.2
Militants resort to burglary.....p.3
Sanctioning genocide.....p.5
Special on Upper
Egypt.....p.145
A suitable boy —
and a partner too.....p.15

Netanyahu said, "The well-being of the Jewish community in Hebron, which is the oldest in the world, dating back 3,500 years, is a priority."

Reliable sources told the *Weekly* that Netanyahu "is committed to fulfilling agreements, out of his pace". The Israeli leader made it clear here in Washington that he is not in a hurry as he does not want to distract his coalition government back home. Netanyahu also claimed that signed agreements are not a closed master when security is the real issue to both Israel and US.

United States Secretary of State Warren Christopher asked Netanyahu to implement the clauses of the Oslo agreements, beginning with redeployment in Hebron. "It's time to take concrete steps on the ground," Christopher told Netanyahu in Washington. "It is very important to meet our commitments."

But Netanyahu was blunt in his reply. "I told Christopher: I reject the call to withdraw Israeli troops out of the Arab-populated areas of the West Bank town of Hebron," he told Israeli reporters before meeting US President Bill Clinton. "I don't feel any pressure, and I don't think there will be any pressure."

Washington's emphasis on Hebron came as an unwelcome surprise to Netanyahu, so he shifted the pressure to Syria. Israeli sources in Washington said that Netanyahu and his aide, Dore Gold, were convinced that the Clinton administration would not dare to put serious pressure on him before the November elections, for fear of losing the Jewish vote.

Netanyahu was given a grace period by the Clinton administration when he came to power, to enable him to come to grips with his coalition and meet the commitments signed by the previous Israeli government. "Now it has been a long grace period and it is time to move," a US administration official told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

In Washington, Palestinian Minister of International Cooperation Nabil Shaath told the *Weekly*: "We will not change a comma in the agreement that was signed here at the White House, and Israel has to respect its word. We will not open up or renegotiate anything that has been settled before."

After his meeting with Clinton, Netanyahu was given a grace period by the Clinton administration when he came to power, to enable him to come to grips with his coalition and meet the commitments signed by the previous Israeli government. "Now it has been a long grace period and it is time to move," a US administration official told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

At the end of his two-day visit to the US, Netanyahu addressed the American Jewish Organisation in New York. He called for a "Jewish renaissance", urging his audience to send their teenagers to Israel where "they can be part of rightist programmes, of leftist programmes — I do not care as long as they come to Israel".

Down to jobs for peace

As Arafat and Netanyahu have their 'historic' handshake, economic hardship and peace process apathy reign in the Occupied Territories — which is good news for Likud, writes Graham Usher from Jerusalem

provides".

If the PNA believed such comments were so much fodder to feed Netanyahu's Likud and American constituencies, it was quickly disbursed of the idea. Following the first meeting of the Israeli-Palestinian steering committee on 9 September, chief PNA negotiator Saeb Erekat reiterated that the Palestinians "would not allow the amendment of one single letter in the interim agreements".

But this is not Israel's reading. Since

about" Palestine's political factions, including Arafat's Fatah movement.

The danger of such apathy is that it squares with Likud's strategy for the interim period, which is to be tough on political issues like Jerusalem and Hebron but flexible on the Palestinians' economic welfare in the territories. It also frees Arafat and the PNA to adjust to such emphases.

Sources say the PLO leader agreed to

the ambiguous "document of understandings" (and so, in all probability, a retreat on Hebron) not only to expedite a meeting with Netanyahu, but also to ease the economic plight of Palestinians caused by Israel's closure of the self-rule areas, where unemployment is an average of 32 per cent in the West Bank and 40 per cent in Gaza. "I'm not asking you for money," Arafat is reported to have told Netanyahu on 4 September. "I'm asking you to let us work so that hunger won't be exploited by extremist forces".

It is a warning Likud hears loud and clear. At a meeting of international donors in Washington on 7 September, Israel announced it would grant 12,000 more work permits to the self-rule areas, swelling the number of Palestinians working inside Israel to over 50,000, the highest figure since the first wave of suicide bombings in Israel in February.

Meetings such as the Arafat-Netanyahu encounter may avert any domestic challenge to Arafat and the PNA for the time being. Yet, as the Palestinian political analyst Ghassan Khaila says, such a negotiating stance boils down to trading "Palestinians' national rights for jobs". It also brings nearer to fruition Likud's vision of peace with the Palestinians as spelled out by Netanyahu to his party on 5 September. "I have sidings for [Labour opposition leader] Peres," Netanyahu told the 1,500 Likud members in attendance. "There really is a new Middle East, and in it there is not and never will be a Palestinian state."



Hebron is on the agenda of future negotiations, "it means Hebron is being negotiated", as chief Israeli negotiator, Dan Shomron, logically put it. Meanwhile, Arafat — on a visit to Japan — warned that "Palestinians were losing patience with the Israelis".

In fact, Palestinians appear to be losing interest in the whole Oslo process, however grim the economic situation is in Gaza and dire the prospects are for Hebron. The Netanyahu-Arafat meeting, however, was received with an eloquent silence by the Islamist and PLO opposition in the Occupied Territories; they are saving their fire for the US's current onslaught against Iraq. Even more disturbingly, opinion polls carried out in the run-up to the resumption of talks showed that while a majority still backed the peace process, a colossal 51 per cent of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza "no longer trusted or held any opinion

KDP sweeps "Safe haven"

AS THOUSANDS of Kurdish refugees massed along the rugged hills of the Iranian border, Iraqi ground forces fired two missiles yesterday at a pair of US planes patrolling the no-fly zone in northern Iraq. The F-16 jets were not hit.

"Both missiles missed, the planes returned safely," US Maj. Lewis Boon of the US European Command based in Frankfurt, told the Associated Press.

The missiles were launched from an unknown position on the ground at 7.50am [0450 GMT], Boon said. "The F-16's did not respond to the attack because their radars were switched off," he added.

Reuters quoted a Washington official, who asked not to be named, as saying that "one or possibly two SAM-6's [surface-to-air missiles] were fired at two F-16's after they were briefly illuminated by Iraqi radar." The two missiles "were errant and neither jet was damaged," the official said.

The incident was expected to heighten tensions between Washington and Baghdad in the wake of last week's US cruise missile attacks against air defences in southern Iraq. It came one day after Washington accused Iraq of rebuilding those air defences in the south and warned that it might resume strikes.

The F-16's are part of a US-led allied air force, based in southern Turkey, which has been patrolling the skies over northern Iraq allegedly to provide Kurds with protection against the forces of President Saddam Hussein.

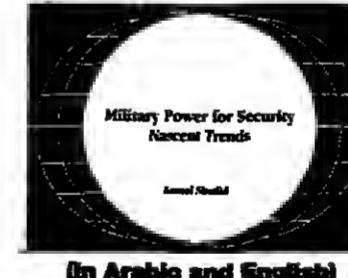
The US declared "safe haven" collied with the triumph of a Baghdad-backed Kurdish faction in civil fighting with a rival faction and Saddam, reasserting control of the north, lifted trade and travel barriers that had stood since the Gulf War.

Saddam's Kurdish allies flaunted their new authority over the northeastern city of Sulaymaniyah, Tuesday, parading through the streets and looting the headquarters of their vanquished rivals for trophies — even toilet seats and light bulbs.

Tens of thousands of Kurds fled Sulaymaniyah for the Iranian border after guerrillas of the Baghdad-backed Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) rolled into the city on Monday night.

UN officials estimated up to 50,000 Kurds might have left but many refugees started returning home, reassured by news that Saddam's troops had not entered the city. (see p.5)

KURASAT ISTRATIJIYA (41)



(In Arabic and English)

- 23- Intra-Arab State Conflicts
- 24- The League of Arab States: Prospective Challenges
- 25- Islamic Fundamentalism and its Image in the Western Media
- 26- Management of Ethnic Issues in the Arab World
- 27- Mediterraneanism: A New Dimension in Egypt's Foreign Policy
- 28- Israeli Nuclear Arsenal: Challenge and Response
- 29- Conventional Arms Control in the Middle East
- 30- The Clash of Civilizations and the Humanitarian Alternative
- 31- Qualitative Military Superiority
- 32- Women Conference in Beijing
- 33- The Middle Eastern Market in the Arab Israeli Peace Equation
- 34- The Religious Trends in the Arab Maghreb, A Comparative Analysis
- 35- Egypt's National Project: An Economic Vision for the year 2020
- 36- The Arabs and the West: Towards a Constructive Dialogue
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Six militants wanted

THE INTERIOR Ministry published an appeal in Arabic-language newspapers on Monday, urging the public to provide information on six Islamist militants.

The statement said that "the state security forces have been able to identify accurately six terrorists wanted by police who have carried out criminal acts recently" after "selling themselves to the devil for a handful of pounds".

The ministry appealed to the public to provide information that might lead to their arrest. The six, the statement said, had eluded the security forces by faking identity papers and putting other people's photographs on them.

The newspapers printed the pictures, names, and ages of the six: Ahmed Yehya, 26, Adel Yehya, 19, Yehya Yehya, 18, Taha Yehya, 22, Hussein Fayed, 19, and Abdel-Nabi Ahmed Ali, 24. They are all from the Governorate of Beni-Suef, south of Cairo.

The statement listed several telephone numbers for the public to call.

Accusation rebuffed

AFTER more than a year since the failed attempt on President Hosni Mubarak's life in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, Egypt accused Iran this week of being directly involved, along with Sudan, in the attempt. Like Khartoum, Tehran denied the charge.

According to Osama El-Baz, Mubarak's top political adviser, the Egyptian terrorist group which carried out the attempt in June last year was assisted by the governments of Tehran and Khartoum. This was the first time that Cairo accused Iran of involvement in the assassination attempt although Egypt previously claimed that Tehran supported Egyptian militants bent on undermining its government. A spokesman for the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs rejected El-Baz's accusations as "false claims".

Investigations carried out by Ethiopian authorities, following the assassination attempt, proved Sudanese involvement, but a Tehran connection was not mentioned. The attempt was executed by 11 terrorists: five were killed, three arrested and three fled the country. The Ethiopian government said that Sudan provided the assailants with arms, training and refuge, and smuggled the escaped terrorists across the border to Sudan.

Iran, championing the cause of Islamic unity, attempted lately to improve its relations with Arab states, especially Egypt. Encouraged by a Syrian mediation effort, Tehran made overtures to Cairo in July but was rebuffed. Egypt said that it has unquestionable proof that Iran is exporting terrorism to the region, threatening Egypt's stability and national security.

CIA-Jihad connection?

AHMED Rashed, described as a former strategist for the anti-government Jihad organisation, has accused the West of harbouring terrorists to use them to put pressure on their home countries. In an interview with Arabic-language newspapers, which took place at Torah Prison, Rashed also claimed that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had maintained connections with the Jihad organisation, particularly its expatriate leader Ayman El-Zawahri. The interview was published by *Al-Ahram* and other newspapers Monday.

Rashed, also described as a "reputable" Arab-Afghan, claimed that Western countries grant political asylum to terrorists in order to use them to "twist the arms" of the Arab states. While the West uses "lofty phrases" to talk about human rights, he said, "these phrases disappear if the crimes are directed against the West and sanctions are imposed against [offending] countries, like what happened to Libya."

Accusing the Western governments of using double standards, Rashed said: "If harm befalls them, they attack peoples and impose sanctions. But if the action is directed at the Arabs and Muslims, they come out with grandiose slogans. This makes it clear that these states have an interest in not extraditing the terrorists who live on their territory. There are bonds between these criminals and the states that look after them and provide them with assistance and facilities."

In another section of the interview, Rashed said that "covering up the activities of these terrorists and allowing them to organise conferences confirms the suspect nature of the relationship between the leaders of terrorism and the foreign intelligence services". Rashed cited the case of the CIA, which, he said, maintained connections with the Jihad organisation "in Pakistan"—an apparent allusion to Jihad using Pakistan as a springboard for the war against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. These connections, he said, became stronger in the early 1990s, with El-Zawahri sending one of his aides to the United States to ask for \$50 million to stage a coup in Egypt.

"By 1992 the money in El-Zawahri's bank accounts amounted to \$12 million," Rashed said. "He had turned from a *mujahid* to a forger and mercenary of foreign agencies."

Great expectations

TWENTY-TWO disabled athletes were decorated by President Hosni Mubarak on Saturday for bringing home 30 gold, silver and bronze medals from the 1996 Paralympics in Atlanta, reports Nevin Khalil.

Calling them "Egypt's champions and ambassadors abroad", Mubarak congratulated the athletes for outdoing their able counterparts, who came back empty-handed. "What you achieved is honourable, and makes me proud that Egypt's children are of this calibre," said Mubarak during the short ceremony attended by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Chairman of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports Abd-Moneim Emara.

Eight athletes who won gold, six coaches and the head of the General Union for Sports Clubs for the Disabled received the Sports Decoration of the First Order. Karima Zaki won a gold in the discus; Zakia Abdel-Rahman won a gold in the javelin and a silver in the shot put; Mervat El-Sayed won a gold in the shot put and a silver in the discus; Ahmed Antar a gold in the shot put and bronze in the javelin and discus; Ahmed Sediq won a gold in the 400m sprint and a bronze in the 100m sprint; Ahmed Khaty a gold in the discus and a silver in the javelin; Mohamed Abd-Qader a gold in the discus; and Ahmed Gomaa a gold in weightlifting.

Another 14 athletes received the Sports Decoration of the Second Order for their acquisitions in silver and bronze. The seven silver medallists included Ashraf El-Safy in the shot put; Metwally Moshafa, Emad Babgat and Mustafa Fadlo in weightlifting; Sherif El-Husseini with two silvers in weightlifting; Han Eissa with a silver in the shot put and a bronze in the discus and Esam Zeidan in swimming. The bronze medallists were Soheir El-Komi and Shehab El-Khatib in the shot put; Hossamuddin Mohamed and Ayman Ali in the discus; Mohamed Amrin in the javelin; Abd-Moneim Salih in the discus and finally Waled Abd-Qader in swimming.

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At the crossroads

Egypt may postpone the regional economic summit in reaction to Israel's footdragging in the peace process. Nevin Khalil reports

Egypt is seriously considering postponing the third Middle East/ North Africa Economic Summit (MENA III), currently scheduled for 12-14 November, because Israel is not working hard enough to make the peace process succeed, says presidential adviser Osama El-Baz. A possible re-scheduling is expected for next spring, which would give time for the air to clear and progress to be made on the peace tracks. Egypt had said that would be "impossible" to hold the summit in November if Israel did not carry out the long-delayed redeployment of Israeli troops in Hebron. Israel has still made no move towards fulfilling this pledge.

Although Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with Palestinian President Yasser Arafat last week, a breakthrough in itself, Israel has not been forthcoming on any of the Arab demands.

El-Baz, President Hosni Mubarak's chief political adviser, said that the summit needed to be more than "just a ceremonial conference" and could not happen if Israel continued to pursue its强硬 policies.

Speaking at the Arab-German Chamber of Commerce on Monday, El-Baz insisted that Egypt's position was not based on political considerations, but rather on whether the atmosphere would be conducive to a successful summit. Egypt is worried about the scale of participation if the peace talks remain deadlocked. "We are not interested in whether the summit will be held or not," El-Baz said. "We are interested in whether it will achieve its goals." He added that consultations were underway with various parties to postpone the sum-

mit until "a better time, next spring maybe". Foreign Minister Amr Moussa displayed a similar lack of optimism earlier this week. "Today the picture does not look good," Moussa told reporters after a short Mubarak-Arafat meeting in Cairo last Saturday. "The point is not just meeting and shaking hands, the point is implementing agreements," Moussa said in reference to Arafat and Netanyahu's inconclusive meeting. He said that since there had been no progress so far, Egypt was standing its ground, warning that as deadlines passed, "the credibility of the peace process will be at stake."

Mustafa Khalil, Egypt's prime minister during the Egyptian-Israeli peace talks in the late 1970s, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that Israel needed to work on its credibility. "Although Netanyahu's rhetoric during the [election] campaign was mainly concerned with security, a change of ideology should come about," Khalil said. Anyway, he added, there was bound to be a "stalemate" in the peace process" until after the US elections in November.

Asked whether Egypt should have demanded more than Israeli redeployment in Hebron as a prerequisite for holding the summit, Khalil said that the terms announced had probably been set by the Palestinians. "Egypt cannot ask for more because it is not party to the bilateral negotiations," he explained, "therefore, it can only demand what the Palestinians want."

The business community in the region was upset by the possible cancellation or postponement of the summit, although it remains hopeful about prospects for economic cooperation. Taher Helmy, a prominent Egyptian businessman, sug-

gested highlighting the economic benefits of the summit which "would be a good incentive for the peace process to proceed in a regular way". Helmy expects an Israeli delegation to attend the summit "no matter what", because regional economic integration is at the heart of Israel's agenda in the peace process.

Saudi Arabian businessmen, who carry great weight and are potentially important in the field of regional economic cooperation and development, have so far stayed away from the MENA conferences. They did not attend the first two held in Casablanca and Amman. Businessman Hussein El-Shobokshi will be one of the few Saudis attending MENA III when it is finally held. El-Shobokshi sees a strong link between regional cooperation and progress in the peace process. He criticised Israel's policies for hindering Arab business by continuously placing "serious political obstacles" in their way.

Although Israel "can do without the summit, at the end of the day it can't maintain its continual aggravation and abuse of the situation," he said. In similar vein, El-Baz urged Israeli businessmen to try to persuade their government to make progress towards peace "so that regional economic relations rest on sound foundations". In the coming weeks, he continued, Israel should honour its commitments and proceed on a road more conducive to peace. "We have to turn over a new leaf, not only by words but by deeds," El-Baz said.

Washington, too, is eager to seek "concrete steps" from Israel that will ensure that gains made in negotiations with the Palestinians will not be lost, according to US Secretary of State Helmy.

Warren Christopher. These include Israeli withdrawal from Hebron according to the agreed timetable and a further lifting of the closure of the Palestinian territories.

Israel, however, continues to aggravate the situation, with some officials saying that troops will be redeployed only when the time is right and that they are not bound by set dates. Also this week, Tel Aviv installed more mobile homes in the West Bank as part of its policy of expanding Jewish settlements on occupied Arab land.

Before meeting with US President Bill Clinton on Monday, Netanyahu said that he did "not feel any pressure, and I don't think there will be any pressure."

Netanyahu, who ran for office pledging to slow down the pace of the Palestinian autonomy process and guarantee that it would not weaken Israeli security, apparently did not present the US administration with concrete plans for withdrawal from Hebron.

A more ominous sign from Israel was Netanyahu's emphasis that his government would not be bound by the previous government's unwritten agreements with the Syrians and Palestinians. "I want to make it clear that this government is not the previous government," Netanyahu said earlier this week. "It was elected on a different platform."

Netanyahu's predecessor, Shimon Peres, warned the new Israeli cabinet on Monday that time was not on its side. "The Jewish people may not have as much time as they think," Peres told Jewish-American leaders. "I would be very careful in wasting time."



Lawyer battles cement plants

A lawyer is pursuing a one-man crusade against cement companies in Helwan for polluting the area's air. Sherine Nasr and Reem Leila report

Mohamed El-Damaty, a lawyer and Helwan resident, has been engaged in a legal battle with three public sector cement companies for the past eight years. The companies' factories, he says, are responsible for polluting the air of the Helwan area — a charge which the companies concerned strongly dispute.

The latest lawsuit brought by El-Damaty against the three companies is currently being heard by the Helwan Miscreants Court; the next session is scheduled for 19 September.

El-Damaty began his campaign back in 1988. He has taken action not only against the cement companies, but also the ministers of health and housing whom he held responsible for the air pollution in the area — all the way from Torah, north of Helwan, to Al-Tebbin, to the south — all southern suburbs of Cairo.

He claims the pollution is caused by waste emitted from the factory chimneys, a charge backed by a fact-finding committee of experts who came to the conclusion that the air of the area was highly polluted and that the cement factories were to blame.

However, the case was thrown out of court on a legal technicality, because the committee had not been sworn in before the court before starting its work. El-Damaty then filed an appeal with a higher court which set up another committee of experts to investigate the situation.

El-Damaty said the court order meant that the Helwan had the right to seek financial compensation because of the harm inflicted on them by the cement companies. "This is why the companies took the case to the Court of Cassation, which may take up to five years to reach a decision. During this period, applications for compensation will not be con-

sidered."

In an attempt to speed things up, El-Damaty filed a new lawsuit with the Helwan Miscreants Court last month, hoping that if he won, residents would be able to go ahead and seek compensation.

Hilali Mahmoud Hilali, head of the legal department at Cement Portland Torah, one of the three companies involved, expressed confidence that the case would be rejected by the court. He said that the three companies had already acted on the instructions of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) and installed filters. "We will submit expert reports to the court showing that these filters work at a 95 per cent capacity," he said.

And even if the pollution charge were proved, Hilali asked, who would held responsible? "Is it the incumbent company chairman, the one before him or the one who held the post 20 or 30 years ago?"

The filters were provided by the EEAA, which also provides the companies with technical assistance and staff supervision. The agency also set up a special fund to finance the maintenance of the filters while an agency affiliate submits a monthly report on the pollution levels at the factories, said Salah Hafez, the agency's executive director.

"Like any other machine, these filters may break down, so we make sure they get proper

maintenance," he explained.

According to Hilali, it would not be practical to relocate the factories. "It would take years," he said. "Moreover, these factories are antiquated and, once dismantled, they could not be re-assembled."

Under the Penal Code, polluting the environment is punishable by a year's imprisonment. And under an environment protection law passed in 1994, causing air pollution is punishable by a fine ranging between LE200 and LE20,000. The punishment is raised to imprisonment, for up to three years, if the offence is repeated.

The same law gives the cement factories a three-year grace period, until the end of 1997, to adjust their conditions to eliminate further pollution.

But according to Mahmoud Qandil of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR), the damage has already been done. "We are talking here about people's lives," he said. "Some may die, and others will be ill for the rest of their lives, while the hands of the courts are tied by legal texts that do not provide an adequate deterrent."

Water pollution is El-Damaty's next battle. He has already filed a lawsuit against several government departments, charging that they are responsible for contaminating the waters of the Nile in the area between Torah and El-Tebbin.

Abu Zeid's lawyers in an uphill battle

Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid's lawyers are fighting to overturn a court order separating him from his wife, but prospects for success are slim. Khaled Dawoud reports

Lawyers acting for Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid, the Cairo University professor of Arabic ordered to be separated from his wife by Egypt's highest court, have swung into action in the couple's defense.

The Court of Cassation's decision to uphold a previous ruling in a lower court came as a shock to most intellectuals. The court endorsed Abu Zeid's condemnation as an apostate and upheld the decision separating him from his wife on the grounds that a Muslim woman cannot be married to a non-Muslim man.

Abu Zeid's lawyers are battling on three legal fronts to overturn both the original ruling, handed out by a court of appeal, and the Court of Cassation's decision to endorse it. But they concede that their chances of success are slim.

On the first front, a lawsuit filed by Abu Zeid's lawyers nearly a year ago to dispute the court of appeal's ruling, and stop its implementation, came up for consideration at Cairo's Urgent Affairs Court on Tuesday. The hearing was postponed until 15 October.

The lawyers had sought to freeze the appeal court's separation ruling, passed in July 1995, on the grounds that they had taken the case to the higher Court of Cassation. Several legal experts have argued that this motion became worthless after the Court of Cassation gave its ruling on 5 August. But Mustafa Hassan, one of Abu Zeid's lawyers, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the defense panel has new reasons to demand a freeze of the court of appeal's ruling, irrespective of the Court of Cassation's decision.

On the second front, the defense lawyers have filed a separate lawsuit with Cairo's Southern Court of Appeal, charging that the Court of Cassation made grave mistakes in reaching its decision, and demanding its nullification. This case will be considered on 14 October.

In the third and possibly most significant lawsuit, the lawyers are contesting the competence of the Court of Cassation circuit,

headed by Judge Mohamed Misbah Sharabayeh, which handled the case. The lawyers have submitted a 19-page memorandum, arguing that the Court of Cassation violated some important legal principles when it made its decision.

In the memo, Abu Zeid's lawyers argue that all courts should heed a legal amendment approved by the People's Assembly in June, prohibiting people from taking legal action on the basis of *hishba*, unless they have a direct personal interest in the case. The Islamic principle of *hishba* entitles any Muslim to take legal action against another whose actions he considers to be harmful to Islam. However, under the June amendment, people seeking to file *hishba* lawsuits have first to present their demand to the Prosecutor General, who has the sole right to decide whether the complaint should be sent to the court or thrown out.

The memo also argued that the five-judge bench had not observed the legal precedents which the Court of Cassation itself had set in dealing with apostates. They quoted earlier rulings which declared that a person should be questioned by the court before he is declared an apostate, and that if this person insists he is Muslim, he cannot be declared an apostate.

In Abu Zeid's case, the lawyers said, the court not only failed to question him, but even rejected an affidavit from him confirming his commitment to Islam and insisting that his writings discussed religious matters in what he believed was an objective and rational manner.

The bench, in its explanation of its ruling, said that questioning the alleged apostate was optional, not obligatory, according to the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence, which was the view it had chosen to embrace.

Abu Zeid's lawyers, citing previous cases, also argued that since the Court of Cassation was setting an important legal pre-

cedent, it should have increased the number of judges sitting on the bench from five to at least seven. Its failure to do so, they said, should be enough to invalidate its decision.

As Abu

Cairo hails London cancellation

Less than 48 hours before a 'Rally for Islamic Revival' was due to open in London last Sunday, the organisers, led by Omar Bakri's Al-Muhajeroun group, issued a statement announcing its cancellation for security reasons.

The news was welcomed by Egyptian officials, with Foreign Minister Amr Mousa declaring that the cancellation was the 'best option for all concerned'. Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi seized on the occasion to review a proposal by President Hosni Mubarak for the establishment of a UN anti-terrorism mechanism.

The rally, described by Egyptian officials as a gathering of terrorists, was called off because the organisers were unwilling to meet the costs of extra security measures at the 12,000-seat London Arena, site of the conference. 'It became apparent a week or 10 days ago that the security arrangements that are part of our normal hire charge were going to be inadequate as a result of the publicity surrounding this event,' said Alex McGrindle, general manager of the London Arena.

'The organisers had an obligation to meet any additional costs, but unfortunately, due to the amount involved, they decided this [Friday] morning that they could not meet those costs.'

He added that 'the number of internal security guards we would have employed would have been roughly three times that which we would normally have employed.'

A statement by Al-Muhajeroun said that while the group's members felt bitter, the cancellation had been necessary because of the pressure,

complaints and opposition from the leaders of various Muslim states. Al-Muhajeroun also blamed a hostile media and pressure from the British government for the cancellation.

The British government had issued a stern warning to the organisers that it would not tolerate statements supporting terrorism, but said it had no powers to prevent the meeting. The rally had been expected to attract some 7,000 Islamist activists from around the world.

Visitors to the conference were to have heard videotaped speeches by Osama bin Laden, a Saudi Arabian millionaire believed to be the financier of militant groups, and Sheikh Omar Abdel-Rahman, leader of the Egyptian Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya. Abdel-Rahman was convicted earlier this year by an American court for conspiracy to blow up New York landmarks and sentenced to life in prison.

Al-Muhajeroun leader Omar Bakri said that although the rally had been cancelled, it would nevertheless take place in the form of a series of lectures in secret locations, which, he predicted, would be attended by thousands.

Bakri and other organisers appeared on Sunday at 'Speakers' Corner, a section of London's Hyde Park where any group or individual is free to speak on any issue, drawing a crowd of about 100, including gay protesters who objected to the militants' anti-homosexual views.

Bakri told his listeners that one day Britain and the whole world would be governed by Islam. 'We will struggle to establish the Muslim

flag over Downing Street and all over the world,' he vowed.

In an interview published by the Cairo weekly magazine *Rose Al-Youssef*, Bakri said the militant Islamist groups active in London had already reached an agreement to 'set up a united Islamic front to lead the *Jihad* for the establishment of the Caliphate... and the liberation of occupied Muslim territories such as Palestine, Bosnia and Chechnya.'

The militants would become involved in a political and ideological conflict with Arab governments, Bakri said. However, each group would remain free to decide the form and means by which it would struggle against the government of its own homeland.

News of the cancellation of the conference was warmly received in Egypt. President Mubarak had complained last week that the rally would be a forum for extremists and supporters of terrorism. 'I am surprised that this conference, which includes many of the elements which support terrorism, is to convene,' Mubarak said on 28 August. 'This does not serve the fight against international terrorism.'

Following the rally's cancellation, Mubarak was quoted by El-Alfi as saying the UN should set up a new mechanism, styled after its anti-narcotics agency, to coordinate international cooperation in the war against terrorism. The new mechanism, El-Alfi said, should have offices in various world capitals, gather information about terrorists and their supporters, and cooperate

closely with the local security authorities.

He expressed surprise that the Egyptian media had come under fire for denouncing this 'conference of terrorists'.

'What was the Arab-Islamic world expected to do in response to a gathering of outlaws bent on establishing phony leaderships and collecting "Muslims' money for killing, destruction and doings Islam a disservice?'

El-Alfi found it 'bizarre' that the conference was being held at a time when the whole world had been alerted to the dangers of terrorism and the importance of cooperation in fighting it. 'And it is even more bizarre that Britain, which was to host the conference, had suffered, and continues to suffer, from terrorist crimes that have led to great loss of life.'

Talk of human rights by the Western states as a justification for providing shelter for terrorists was unacceptable, he said. 'The meetings held by these terrorists are clearly aimed at making plans for acts of violence, killing and sabotage in their home countries.'

But he added that Egypt had not been worried by the plans for the London conference because 'Egyptian security' has been able to set up a strong barricade thwarting any terrorist attempts at infiltration.'

At a meeting with young members of the ruling National Democratic Party, El-Alfi said that plans would certainly have been made at the London conference for overthrowing a number of Arab governments.

Avoiding vagueness in penal statutes

Awad El-Morti, chief justice of the Supreme Constitutional Court, examines court rulings limiting the application of inappropriate penal statutes



Case No 3 for the 10th judicial year, decided on 2 January 1993, required the Court to adjudicate a constitutional question in relation to decree Law No 98 (1945) regarding vagabonds and suspects.

According to Article 5 of that statute anyone over 18 years, either notoriously habitual or to more than once convicted for committing crimes or achieving acts of the kinds specified therein shall be considered a suspect.

In striking down this legislation the Court declared that penal statutes directly affect the right to life, to liberty and property. The infliction of punishment in old times symbolised tyranny and oppression and was envisaged as a tool for the satisfaction of greed and deviate ambitions. Any rationale linkage connecting the methods and goals of penal law with social considerations were thus evaded.

The emergence of civilised and consolidated patterns of conduct encouraged the adoption of an integrated system of criminal justice repudiated by unjustified encroachments on liberty and affirming of the premise that human rights and freedoms should not be unnecessarily sacrificed or intruded upon.

Indeed, freedom and the sanctity of life, are inextricably bound together. The Court also bore in mind that the draconian measures of the past need not survive endlessly in the face of growing vital societal interests and that penalties improperly applied erode rational objectives.

Stringent measures and rigid standards were thus applied in order to clarify the scope of incrimination, and to deprive the trial court from the power to criminalise acts or omissions not so considered by the legislature.

Under Article 66 of the Constitution which adheres to contemporary advanced systems of criminal justice on crime or penalty shall be prescribed except within the limits of law, and no punishment shall be inflicted except in relation to acts committed after the enforcement of the law in which they were defined. In so doing the Constitution clarified that every crime has a material element, represented by an act or omission committed in violation of a criminal statute, thus indicating that the aim of criminal statutes is not to punish thoughts but only to take cognizance of acts — whether in a negative or positive form — if committed, despite their inincrimination.

Indeed the application of penal laws is directly attached to specific activities materially demonstrated, and externally expressed, thus denoting the will of the offender, establishing the dividing line between different crimes, perceiving the possibility of their being evidenced and adjudicated by the trial court in order to consider their proportionate punishment. Furthermore, claiming that the mental element of a crime (*mens rea*) could be proved apart from the material element (*actus reus*) is pointless, since what was really intended by the respective offender largely depends on what was materially expressive of his will.

It is understood that according to Article 66 of the Constitution every crime is accompanied with a punishment provided for either by the law itself or within its prescribed limits. The Constitution also requires a degree of clarity and certainty in penal statutes beyond the level within which other statutes may be formulated given the fact that punishment — in itself — carries with it the most serious and dangerous restrictions which could be enforced to the detriment of personal liberty.

If liberty is to be duly protected any limitations thereon must be narrowly construed, vigorously ascertained and unequivocally defined in order to offer to their addressees fair notice demarcating the content of proscribed acts or omissions and the boundaries of punishments associated therewith. Consequently the enforcement of penal statutes is conditioned on precise limits narrowly tailored, in order to repel vagueness and overbreadth, and to oppose elusiveness. Otherwise, proscribed activities will be left in darkness, casting serious doubts as to the unified standards required for punishment, and the coextensiveness of the legislature's intent. In such situations, the trial court may muddle proscribed activities with others and make selective choices as to their penalties in negation of the legal premise that everyone has an absolute right to protect his liberty against the hazards of punishments and their misuse. Therefore, any deviation of power that violates the fairness of trial prescribed by Article 67 of the Constitution shall not stand.

Indeed, individuals are not to be ambushed by penal provisions, nor liberated from their proper application. In the light of the above, the legal certainty of criminal provisions must be viewed as a constitutional requirement, falling within the minimum standards of rights accorded to the accused, which must be neither dispensed with nor renounced.

In addition the Court has long recognised that a fair trial requires the enforcement of the preliminary rules upon which it is based, including the presumption of innocence, entirely related to the proof of guilt and not to the kind or the level of punishment associated with criminal charges. This presumption, being the foundation of all adversarial systems of criminal justice, extends to all suspects and accused, and applies in all critical situations, whether they arise before or in the course of the trial. Individuals are born pure and free and a convicting sentence must clearly show beyond reasonable doubt that their presumed innocence has been rightfully and definitely rebutted.

Under the challenged article suspects who would stand trial are either those generally known to have been accustomed to achieve acts or commit crimes of the kind specified in that article, or else those who, due to their involvement in such acts or crimes, have already received more than one conviction.

The conviction of the first category of presumed offenders is based only on widespread rumours or police reports, frequently framed and often comprising hidden motivations in defiance of other's rights and freedoms and pays no regard to the presumption of innocence which ordains the acquittal of the accused unless all the elements of the crime with which he is charged are proven beyond reasonable doubt.

More important is the fact that such rumours and reports neither equate in amount or degree the commission of definable and ascertainable acts directly attributable to their alleged offender, nor reveal a criminal intent linked with his conscious will.

As to the second category of suspects in respect of whom more than one sentence has been rendered, after being convicted for crimes or acts specified in the challenged article, the Court affirmed that earlier involvement by an individual in criminal conduct is no indication of his or her implication in future crimes. Antecedents in no way definitely entangle an actual behaviour but only demonstrate expectations or even probabilities associated with anticipated activities, and the likelihood of their occurrence. The path for the future cannot be undermined by past events, nor may the history of former circumstances outline its course.

Generating new prosecutions in consequence of prior sentences fully executed dramatically violates the veracity of the well-established constitutional principle according to which no person shall twice be put in jeopardy for the same offence.

In all events suspicion under the challenged decree law is entirely disassociated with activities materially demonstrated, factually witnessed and legally proven but falsely presumed. Thus, by adversely affecting the outcome of the trial from a substantive and procedural perspective in violation of the due process of law and the requirements of a fair trial, including the presumption of innocence instrumental to its proper machinery, the decree law — which failed to observe Articles 41, 66 and 67 of the Constitution — was void, the Court ruled.

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Militants resort to burglary

An upsurge of violence in the southern province of Sohag indicates that the militants are short of money and weapons. Omeyya Abdel-Latif pays a visit to Tahta



Police survey the scene after an attack on jewellery shops owned by Copts in Al-Gomhouria Street

photo: Ahmed Abdel-Razek

The *Umm El-Nour* (Mother of Light) jewellery shop in Al-Gomhouria street in the town of Tahta in Sohag Governorate is called after the Virgin Mary. Its walls are riddled with bullet holes, bearing witness to an armed attack a month ago that claimed the lives of six Copts, including a child.

The shop is one of several Coptic-owned jewellery shops recently targeted by Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya militants, presumably bent on replenishing their empty coffers. The same street, according to eye witnesses, was the scene of a similar bloody attack a week ago, when unidentified gunmen stormed the Mara Metal shop, killing two Coptic jewellers and seriously wounding three other people.

Although the attacks triggered fears that violence in the southern province of Sohag might be on the increase, security sources saw no reason for alarm and insist that the situation is not critical, despite the fact that the assailants remain at large.

These attacks indicate that they [the militants] are back to square one... short of money and weapons,' said Maj. Gen. Nabil Abdel-Salam, security chief for Sohag. 'It's easy for them to attack a village bank or a jewellery shop. They have lost contact with their expatriate leadership. This is a sign that their end is imminent.'

Abdel-Salam said that security had been tightened around banks and jewellery shops in the governorate and shop-owners had been provided with weapons to defend themselves.

A week after the latest atrocity, two policemen have been posted outside every jewellery shop, while plainclothes police continue to patrol the streets. Some owners have opted to shut down their shops until the situation has cooled down.

Tahta residents do not believe that the militants are targeting Copts for religious reasons. They say the Christians are getting

killed simply because they own the jewellery shops. 'They would have killed anybody, regardless of his religion, just to get the money. But it so happens that Copts own most of the jewellery shops,' said Maha Grace, herself a Copt.

He said the attacks had forced business activity to grind to a halt in Al-Gomhouria Street, Tahta's main thoroughfare, and expressed fears that it could turn into 'another Mallawi'.

Many Tahta residents blame the latest upsurge of violence on the neighbouring town of Tema, which has remained a major flashpoint in the battle between militants and the police. 'The militants are escaping from the police and coming to hide here, because even when terrorism was at its peak, our town was spared the bloody confrontation,' said a Tahta resident, who asked to remain anonymous.

Tema, 30km north of Tahta, was recently the scene of an attack on a provincial bank. In addition to killing two bank

guards, the assailants attacked a police patrol and killed a high-ranking officer and three policemen. This was the worst incident of violence in the town, where calm had prevailed for almost a year prior to the attack.

Abdel-Salam said that the security forces have launched raids into the hills surrounding the villages, where most of the wanted men are believed to have taken shelter. Dozens of fugitives — common criminals as well as militants — have been arrested.

In a separate incident of violence in the province of Al-Minya, a Coptic lawyer was killed by three militants at Umm Al-Gesur village near Mallawi because he was believed to have cooperated with the police. A local human rights officer expressed the fear that the militants may have renewed their targeting of Copts, following a period when attacks on them had ceased.



An opposition press reporter, accused of slandering Jihan Sadat, is in jail awaiting trial on charges of libel, bribery and forgery. Shaden Shehab reports

Prosecution authorities have ordered the detention of Ahmed Fikri, a reporter for the Liberal Party's *Al-Ahram* newspaper, for 15 days pending his trial on charges of libel, bribery and forgery. The action was taken against Fikri for publishing a news story considered defamatory to Jihan El-Sadat, wife of the late President Anwar El-Sadat.

The story, which appeared on 19 August, carried the sensationalist headline 'Jihan El-Sadat has an illegitimate child'. The purpose of the article, however, was purported to expose the malpractices of civil servants at birth registration offices. Fikri recounted how he obtained a copy of a birth certificate, and registered himself as the father and Jihan El-Sadat as the mother of a baby boy named Sherif.

Towards the end of the story, the reporter revealed that the certificate contained false information and that he managed to acquire it after bribing a civil servant at the registry office. He had used the name of Jihan El-Sadat, Fikri wrote, to show how public figures could unwittingly become involved in forgery and bribery.

However, during his interrogation, Fikri denied that he had bribed the civil servant. He claimed that this had been inserted into the story by someone on the newspaper's editorial staff. 'We are confident that Ahmed Fikri will be released once the 15-day detention period is over,' said Samir El-Bagouri, one of four lawyers de-

fending the reporter. This period ends on 17 September.

Bagouri expressed confidence that Fikri would emerge from his trial unscathed. The charge of libel, he said, would have to be dropped, because the complaint against Fikri had been filed by Tahat El-Sadat and not Jihan El-Sadat. According to the law, action can only be taken on a complaint filed by the person who is the object of the alleged libel.

The bribery charge, Bagouri added, had been denied by both Fikri and the civil servant at the registry office. He also dismissed the forgery charge on the grounds that Fikri 'had good intentions and did not act to serve personal interests or bring harm to others. What he did has been done by other journalists seeking to serve the public good.'

After the story was published, Mustafa Bakri, the newspaper's chief editor, was dismissed by Moustafa Kamel Murad, the Liberal Party's chairman, and replaced by Salih Qahada. No legal action has been taken against Bakri, who has given evidence to prosecution officials.

Bakri, who made it clear that he was absent from the newspaper when the story appeared, published an apology to Mrs Sadat, emphasising that no offence had been intended. The Press Syndicate said at the time that both Bakri and Fikri would be questioned in connection with the story. However, according to Mohamed Abd-Quodous, a member of the syndicate's coun-

of the party's policy.'

Analysts tend to agree with Bakri that the Liberal Party has no coherent ideology, and that, since its birth in 1976, its policies have been ambiguous. A case in point is the party's original support of peace with Israel; matching words with action, Murad accompanied Sadat on his 1977 trip to Jerusalem. However, this run counter to the Islamist stance later taken by the party after it forged an alliance with the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood and Ibrahim Shukri's Labour Party in 1987.

The Liberal Party, which came into existence on the authority of a presidential decree from Sadat, is regarded by many as a tame opposition group. Described by analysts as ineffective, the party has had a limited presence, both in terms of parliamentary representation and public support.

However, this is in sharp contrast with the kind of sensationalist reporting which the newspaper, *Al-Ahram*, came to espouse. The Liberal Party has also come under fire for 'sub-leaking' its other publications, said to number as many as 19, to serve as mouthpieces for other political forces. Party officials have defended this policy on the grounds that a liberal party must accommodate views from across the political spectrum.

Bakri, however, argues that 'the Liberal Party has no specific platform and the line the newspaper took did not deviate from the basic points

Edited by Wadie Kirolos

Shi'ite coalition wins

Hizbullah scored a political victory in the fourth round of parliamentary elections in Lebanon. It managed to win four seats in the new legislature after losing two in the previous rounds of voting.

The joint election ticket formed by the two main rival Shi'ite political forces in the south, the Amal movement and Hizbullah, came off with flying colours. All 21 candidates on the Liberation and Development ticket headed by House Speaker and Amal chief Nabih Berri managed to win seats. Two other winners were incumbent deputies Bahiya Al-Hariri, sister of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri, who was supported by Berri, and Moustafa Saad who enjoyed the backing of Hizbullah.

Deputy Hariri had originally been on Berri's election ticket but decided to run as an independent due to his coalition with Hizbullah. The last-minute electoral compromise between the long-time foes, who have fought wars in the past and are vying for leadership of the Shi'ite community — the largest religious group in Lebanon — sought to defuse tensions between them. But even though both Amal and Hizbullah will have a joint list in the final elections in the Bekaa Governorate next Sunday, most observers have downplayed the possibility that the alliance will translate into future cooperation in the new legislature.

The Amal-Hizbullah electoral alliance was reached after intensive Syria-mediated talks.

Both Amal and Hizbullah have stressed the importance of the electoral alliance on the

The Amal-Hizbullah alliance won a victory for both sides in the south Lebanon elections, reports Zeina Khodr from Beirut

grounds that it would avert a possible confrontation between their supporters during the elections. In fact, Berri told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that there had been a strong possibility that elections in the south would not have taken place without the coalition agreement. He pointed out that the main reason behind the pact was to ensure security in the area. "We should join ranks since we are facing a common enemy... Israel. If we fight among ourselves this would only benefit Israel," he said. "I hope this pact will be long-term but if not, it is nothing strange. Political alliances are normal even with so-called enemies. This happens all over the world."

Hizbullah's Secretary-General Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah had called on his supporters to back the joint election ticket. But despite the shaky pact, Nasrallah had vehemently criticised Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri who has virtually declared an electoral war on the group he describes as extremist. Hariri has dubbed this year's campaign as a battle between moderation and extremism.

The imam of the southern city of Nabatiyeh, Sheikh Abdul-Hussein Sadek, emphasised the importance of the agreement. "Many, including myself, believe that the agreement is a positive development on the ground or else there could have been a confrontation which would be dangerous to the country and the south. The pact

makes sure that the Lebanese will be united to face the common enemy. Broken ranks would be in Israel's favour. The agreement made sure that the interest of the nation and the resistance is preserved," he told the *Weekly*.

Hizbullah's success has apparently ended speculation that Syria, which is the main power broker in Lebanon, had decided to decrease the movement's influence and reduce its strength in parliament. Scathing attacks against the group during the election campaign had raised expectations that Syria wanted to curb the group. Political analysts believe that Damascus was trying to send a message to the international community, particularly the United States, that it had the power to rein in the guerrilla group which is spearheading the resistance war to oust Israeli soldiers from occupied territory in South Lebanon and the Western Bekaa. It is also believed that Syria wanted to appear as the main foreign power in the country. However, analysts said that the eleventh-hour deal between Hizbullah and Amal actually increased the number of Hizbullah deputies from the south from two to four and indicates that Damascus still needs the group as a pressure card against the hardline government in Israel.

Hizbullah has now four seats in parliament and, according to its pact with Amal, it will present three candidates and two supporters in a

joint ticket for the Bekaa elections. If all three candidates win, it will have seven seats in parliament, one less than in the outgoing legislature.

According to the Interior Ministry, voter turnout reached 48.2 per cent in South Lebanon, compared to 39 per cent during the 1992 elections. Voter turnout in the south was higher than in previous rounds of elections in Mount Lebanon, North Lebanon and Beirut. There were no widespread electoral irregularities during Sunday's ballot in the south, while the first three rounds of voting were marred by allegations of bribery, fraud and intimidation.

The other two rival election tickets led by incumbent deputy Habib Saad and former house speaker Kamel Al-Assad along with independent candidates failed to win any seats.

The elections in the South Lebanon Governorate last Sunday and those of the Bekaa Governorate next Sunday will determine the distribution of seats for Lebanon's 1.3 million Muslim Shi'ites. These two rounds of polls are also an election test for Hizbullah as the final results will determine whether Hizbullah's influence will be marginalised. It is clear, however, that due to regional developments, the group's power will not be curtailed drastically since it is a valuable bargaining card in regional negotiations. The unanswered question is whether this electoral agreement between Hizbullah and Amal is a paper one only or a genuine move meaning that they will join forces in the new National Assembly.

Decisions taken, decisions deferred

Arab ministers meet in ordinary and extraordinary sessions, under the umbrella of the Arab League and outside it. But wonders **Gamil Mattar**, will their meetings in Cairo this week do more than refer vital questions to further study

It is customary for the Arab League Council to convene its autumn session during September of every year. As it is held a little before the opening of the UN General Assembly, the autumn session is especially significant. It is attended by a greater number of foreign ministers than the spring session, in March; its agenda includes many important questions, on which the Arab countries need to coordinate their positions ahead of the UN General Assembly, and such, it usually involves considerable bargaining over each other's support in New York.

It should be made clear at the outset, however, that of the three meetings of Arab foreign ministers which are going to be held in Cairo, starting tomorrow, Friday, only one will take the form of an ordinary session of the Arab League Council. Not every meeting between Arab foreign ministers falls under the League's umbrella. Ministers meeting within the framework of the Arab League's Council can decide to coöperate outside this framework in a special Arab foreign ministers meeting.

This time around, both the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and Egypt have seized the opportunity of the Council's ordinary session to call up Arab ministers to meet in two other separate meetings. The Palestinian National Authority has called for an extraordinary meeting of the Arab League Council in which the head of the PNA, Yasser Arafat, would personally brief Arab ministers on developments on the Palestinian track.

Egypt wants a foreign ministers' meeting — and not a meeting of the Arab League Council — so that Foreign Minister Amr Moussa can brief the Arab ministers on the developments in Israel. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's positions since the Cairo summit, held soon after Netanyahu's election.

The ordinary session number 106 of the Arab League Council will be held on 14 September. Its original agenda included 39 items, to which three others have been added. Topping the agenda are four further items referred from last June's Arab Summit conference, returned to the Council for further study. One of the items is the establishment of an Arab Court of Justice, a subject as old as the League itself. Another is the question of a draft Code of Honour for Arab Security and Cooperation. This is the sort of subject that regularly comes up in the wake of severe Arab crises or differences. The Council discusses them and concludes by issuing a lengthy document. A few years later another severe crisis or disagreement comes up, the subject is again put before the Council, which again issues a lengthy document, but under a different name.

A third item concerns the establishment of an Arab mechanism for conflict prevention, management and resolution. There is no denying the importance of this matter, originally proposed by Tunisians especially since the Organisation of African Unity has adopted a similar project. This project, however, like that of the Arab Court of Justice, is hindered by mysterious obstacles that continue to puzzle political analysts both inside and outside the Arab world. Finally, there is the Libyan proposal to establish an Arab confederation including all the members of the Arab League. I believe that this latter proposal has been floating since the late '80s, when the Arab League headquarters was still in Tunis. In any case, it is highly doubtful that the Council will adopt a positive decision regarding any of these subjects. Most likely, it will decide that they require further study and wider gauging of members' views; committees may also be established to discuss them, before they are once again, put before the coming summit conference, whenever that is held. Beside these critical issues, the agenda includes a number of 'permanent' topics. These are the topics on which, in view of their grave importance, the General Secretariat is directed to regularly brief the Council. They include the proposed treaty to make the Middle East a zone free of weapons of mass destruction; the question of Israel's possession of nuclear weapons and the threats they pose to Arab national security; and the Palestinian question, which is divided into five sub-topics, including the Intifada and its developments, refugees and Jerusalem. Notwithstanding this item and its five sub-topics, there are other permanent items — 'settler colonialism in Palestine', the Conference of Supervisors of Palestinian Affairs, the current status of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). The list of permanent items goes on: the Golani, south Lebanon, Lebanese hostages in Israel, Iran's occupation of UAE islands, Arab-African relations, the Euro-Arab dialogue.

Notably, Iraq has not requested that the US missile attack on it be put on the Council's agenda. It did well not to do so, in my opinion. The outrage expressed by Arab public opinion at the American raids pre-empted the Council. Most Arab governments have had no option but to condemn the American attack, not only out of the conviction that Iraq had committed no crime when it tried to stop a foreign aggression against Iraqi Kurds, and when it tried to bring an end to a foreign-inspired civil war among them, but also because most countries in the world have condemned the American raids. The Security Council was sharply divided and both Britain and the US failed this time to mobilise countries of what was formerly called the anti-Iraq alliance. It was finally made clear that most members of that alliance had joined it on a transient basis and had no intention of becoming the members of a permanent anti-Iraq coalition.

All this was implicitly understood before the convening of the Council and did not need to be formally tabled, which could have caused a split around the position adopted by Kuwait. Such a split would have lost Iraq the political gains it won through the widespread condemnation of the American attack.

The Arab League Council meeting is preceded by two meetings of foreign ministers; Arafat will take part in one of them. This meeting was called for in order to discuss the perils confronting the peace process. The call was issued at a time when Palestinian officials were still waiting for Netanyahu's consent to meet with Arafat. Had Netanyahu refused to meet Arafat, the foreign ministers' meeting that the PNA called for would have focused on the refusal, which would have been considered as indisputable proof that Israel was reneging on its commitments to peace. In fact, there is even more significant incriminating evidence than Netanyahu's procrastination before meeting Arafat. These include the new houses that are being built inside and outside Jerusalem for Jewish settlements, and the economic warfare that the Israeli government has declared on the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza. Even more significant proof lies in Netanyahu's refusal to redeploy forces in Hebron.

Despite all these indications, the Palestinian media and Palestinian political efforts focused on a meeting with "Bibi", and, finally, Netanyahu accepted to meet with Arafat last week. However, immediately afterwards he confirmed his preposterous attack on Palestinians and, in a Likud central committee meeting, stressed that settlements would not be stopped. At the same meeting, Netanyahu also emphasized that the Golan Heights would not be returned, that Jerusalem would always be a Jewish entity, and that Hebron was open for re-negotiation and the expansion of its settlements. Hence, Netanyahu wanted to tell his party and people that his meeting with Arafat was to pacify other governments which did not want the Middle East peace process to succeed as it had reached a stalemate. The image of yet another "historical handshake", flown by the news agencies and pictured by the CNN, would impress public opinion much more effectively and lastingly than any disparate reports on Netanyahu's reneging on Israel's commitments.

It is not yet clear whether Arafat will discuss in detail all the Israeli transgressions that obstruct the peace process, or make a bid for assistance from wealthy Arab states. Put differently, will Arafat tell Arab ministers that the peace process is stagnant or will he ask for their help in resuscitating an impossible endeavour?

Some observers believe that the extraordinary session should have been held before the foreign ministers' meeting which is dedicated to an evaluation of the Likud government's actions. Actually, this meeting will be held in accordance with the recommendations of the Cairo Arab summit held in June. The summit requested Arab foreign ministers to study how far Netanyahu's government is fulfilling its commitments to peace agreements. Hence, it would be more logical for the extraordinary session to dedicate its discussions to the implications to the peace process before the meeting that Egypt called for in its capacity as president of the Cairo summit. It may be, however, that already there is a consensus on issuing a decision or resolution postponing the adoption of the appropriate decision that is commensurate with the in-placable arrogance of Netanyahu's government.

The writer is director of the Arab Centre for Development and Tourism Research.

Cries of Kafrbneit

Elections for the governorates of South Lebanon and Nabatiyeh went smoothly, but for inhabitants of the Israeli-occupied zone, it was not without serious problems as **Amira Howedy** discovered as she stopped at the Kafrbneit crossing

For the first time since its occupation in 1978 by Israel and its client South Lebanese Army (SLA) led by Antoine Lahd, the inhabitants of the 'security zone' were allowed to cross the border and exercise their right to vote in last Sunday's elections. The zone's population, estimated at 20,000, were not permitted to participate in the 1992 elections. A few weeks before this year's elections, Lahd announced his willingness to receive ballot boxes in the zone, thereby enabling its inhabitants to vote. The Lebanese government refused. Only days before the first round of elections, Lahd suddenly announced that the zone's borders would be opened and inhabitants would be allowed to leave and vote.

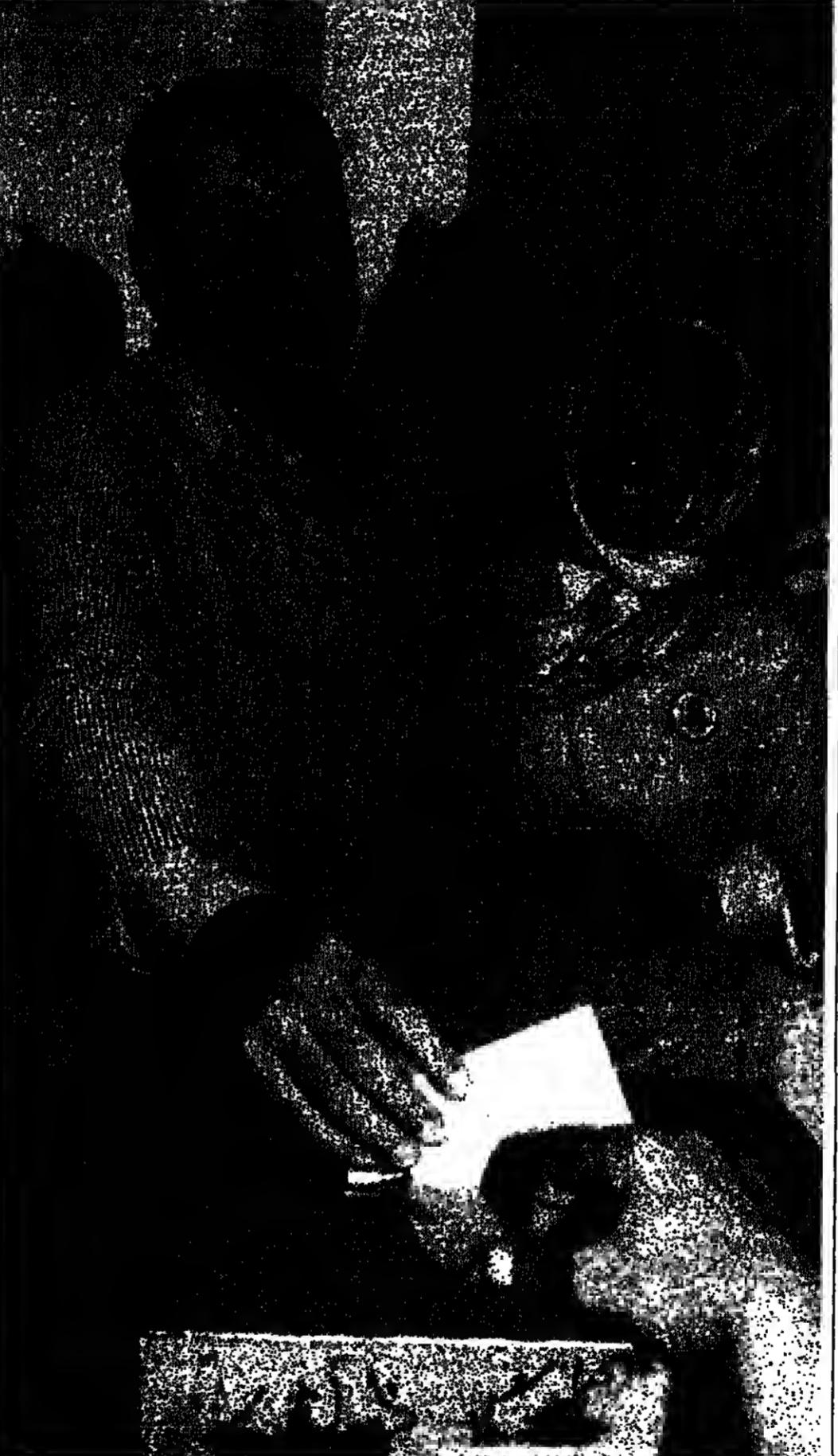
The nine-mile-wide zone has five crossings. Of the five, Kafrbneit, witnessed the largest exodus.

The borders were scheduled to open at 7.00am, but until 8.00am they were still closed. At Kafrbneit, a Lebanese checkpoint was set up and waiting, like many relatives of people in the zone, for the first voters crossing over. At 7.45am, 10 armoured tanks patrolled the area, making those waiting even more nervous. A Lebanese soldier started muttering and said, "Lahd and Israel, you can expect anything from them, they may never allow the people to come."

But at 8.00am a cellular phone rang inside the checkpoint and the caller announced that the borders had opened and the voters were coming "en masse." A few minutes later, the first car coming from the occupied zone appeared, driven by a young Shi'ite *sayed* (sheikh). Smiling at the soldiers, he said, "Don't worry, they're all coming." "I didn't have any problems because I am known as a man of religion," he told the *Weekly*. "I am not involved in politics, that's why I have no problems crossing."

Lahd's sudden willingness to provide so much assistance to the zone's voters raised questions within Lebanon's political circles. Sources told the *Weekly* that the SLA wanted the voters to vote for Amal and Bahiya Al-Hariri in what was described as an 'under the table' agreement. Said the *sayed*, "There is consensus both nationally and internationally that the inhabitants of the occupied zone have the right to vote. Of course, this is not something determined by the SLA or the Lebanese government, but it was agreed on internationally that the crossing will open from 8.00am to 7.00pm... that's why we are here," he said.

He added, however, that the zone is not void of problems for its ordinary citizens. "We live under occupation. This is a reality that we have to face. We are at the mercy of a certain authority. If it wants us to cross the border we will, and



Amal leader and Parliamentary Speaker Nabih Berri casts his vote during Sunday's elections held in South Lebanon. Berri was the highest number of votes in these elections. (photo: AFP)

Anger floods in Khartoum

A hungry man is an angry man. Bread riots that rocked the Sudanese capital last week confirmed the adage, writes **Gamil Nkrumah**

Sudanese peasants are slogging their guts out to eke a meagre living off the land and still go hungry. The plight of the urban poor is even worse.

Politics is often symbolic. When Khartoum's poor go on the rampage, rioting for bread, the world knows that the Sudanese people have had enough. The 1985 bread riots led to the downfall of former Sudanese President Gaafar Numeiri. Sudan experienced military takeovers in 1958, 1964, 1969, 1985 and 1989; bread riots precipitated the coups d'état.

It was during the ominous days of hunger and open revolt that Iranian President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, with an entourage of over 20 top Iranian officials, called in on Sudanese strongman General Omar Hassan Al-Bashir. It was Rafsanjani's second visit to Sudan since 1991 and he promised more military aid in the country. Rafsanjani and Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati, who joined his president on the two-day trip, have been acting as mediators in the conflict between Uganda and Sudan. Accompanied by Ugandan Foreign Minister Eriya Kategaya, Rafsanjani announced that Sudan and Uganda had resumed diplomatic links. Uganda had broken off relations with Sudan in April 1995.

Ignoring a query by a foreign reporter soliciting a commentary on the food shortages in Sudan, Rafsanjani stated in a press conference that Iran had made tremendous technological advances in agriculture and was willing to share its technical know-how with Sudan. "The West eyed Africa's riches with covetous eyes," Rafsanjani told his Sudanese hosts. "The West

raped the land in the name of Christianity and civilization." The Iranian president was alluding to missionary activities in southern Sudan and to British colonial exploitation of the vast tracts of land in the fertile Gezira region of central Sudan. The rich alluvial soils between the Blue and White Nile rivers were used by the British to grow cotton — Sudan's main cash crop — and food crop production in the area seriously declined.

The government in Khartoum, dominated by the National Islamic Front (NIF), has clamped down hard on opposition forces in the aftermath of last week's riots. Omar Abdel-Rahman Omar, a student leader of the 1985 bread riots, was detained last week, and 10 other former student leaders of the 1970s and 1980s were arrested. Security forces arrested five leading Umma Party members: Al-Fadel Ali Adam, Sadiq Mohamed Al-Toum, Mahdi Abdel-Rahman, Mubarak Al-Mahdi Hassan and Abdel-Mahmoud Abu, who is the imam of the influential Wad Nubwi Mosque of Omdurman — a key Mahdist stronghold. "Nothing can placate the people. The government must be removed. Governments have been unseated in Sudan because of bread riots," said Mubarak Al-Mahdi, leading member of the Sudanese opposition National Democratic Alliance and second-in-charge of the Umma Party under Sadeq Al-Mahdi.

Nothing more plainly reveals the peripheralisation of Sudan

quickly hush things up before the arrival of Rafsanjani by rounding up all suspected trouble-makers and putting them in jail. Thousands of NIF supporters lined the streets of Khartoum to welcome the visiting Iranian president.

But the Khartoum masses rioted in protest. Ten thousand demonstrators marched through the Khartoum suburb of Al-Deyoun Al-Shargiya. Rioting rocked the suburbs of Al-Sagama, Al-Sahafa, Al-Shagara and Al-Kalaka and Khartoum's ancient twin city of Omdurman.

The rioters targeted the governor of Khartoum, Badreddin Taha. They marched to his residence in the suburb of Al-Gani, 40km north of downtown Khartoum. His Mercedes was wrecked as demonstrators stoned it. Taha's driver fled for his life. The demonstrators also went for government buildings in the city centre and vicious hand-to-hand fighting took place between students and workers, on the one hand, and riot police and NIF militiamen on the other.

Afaf Mohamed Adam, a 21-year-old student at the University of Cairo, Khartoum Branch — now called Sudan University — was shot dead in the riots last week, as was Karrar Ali Mohamed Omar, a baker's worker. Abdullah Ahmed Abdalla, 18, a student at Omdurman Islamic University, was also shot and later died of his wounds in hospital. The upsurge in anti-Sudanese government sentiment is attributed in part to widespread lack of job security among the employed and rampant unemployment. The unemployment rate now hovers around 75 per cent.

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A human catastrophe

IRAN has appealed for international assistance to prevent a "human catastrophe" as the tens of thousands of Kurds who fled after a week of Kurdish infighting in northern Iraq were approaching the Iranian border.

An Iranian interior Ministry official, Ahmed Hosseini, said that Iran had agreed to accept Kurdish refugees "in emergency situations", namely the sick, wounded and elderly and those whose lives are in danger.

"Our present policy is not to accept new refugees because of our limited resources," he said, adding that Iran already hosts over two million Iraqi and Afghan refugees.

A spokesman for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Rupert Colville, told AFP that 50 per cent of the 500,000 inhabitants of Sulaymaniyah in northern Iraq have fled the city.

(photos: Reuters)



Who stands to win?

Thousands of Kurds fled war-shattered northern Iraq towards Iran in cars, trucks and even bulldozers after the Baghdad-backed Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) seized Sulaymaniyah, the last major city held by the Popular Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The scene is reminiscent of the Kurdish exodus towards Iran in 1990, in fear of the Iraqi forces, before the UN safe haven was established in northern Iraq.

The inter-Kurdish clashes came to a head last month between the two main Kurdish parties in Iraq, Massud Barzani's KDP, supported by Baghdad, and Jalal Talabani's PUK said to be backed by Iran. However, of the other parties involved in the Kurdish issue, the only one that did not manage to gain politically from these clashes were the Kurds themselves.

Iraq, which drove its forces into the north at the request of the KDP and helped the KDP capture the region's capital, Arbil, and, subsequently, Sulaymaniyah; proved to the world that it is still a strong regional power capable of launching successful military operations.

In so doing, Baghdad achieved political victory on three levels. Firstly, it weakened the Iraqi opposition based in northern Iraq and its potential for conspiring against Saddam Hussein's regime under the protection of the UN safe haven.

Members of the Iraqi National Congress (INC), a coalition of Iraqi opposition parties, had to flee Arbil after it was captured by the Iraqi troops and sought political asylum abroad, saying that suicide was better than falling into the hands of Saddam. An INC spokesman who moved to Sulaymaniyah, a KDP stronghold, said there is no apparent danger there but, as "Iraqi" opposition, we feel uneasy. We are not free. We are asking the international community to help us as soon as possible to escape or to get political asylum."

Secondly, Baghdad foiled CIA attempts to topple Saddam. American newspapers revealed after Arbil was cap-

tioned that President Bill Clinton had signed a secret order directing the CIA to provide weapons and military training to Saddam's opponents and help them install intelligence-gathering equipment.

Moreover, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on Sunday that CIA director John Deutch had promised Iraqi dissidents that Saddam would be overthrown within a year, but the Iraqi leader uncovered and foiled the \$20-million operation to unseat him.

The role of the CIA was exposed when the *Washington Post* reported on Sunday that 100 Iraqis associated with the CIA had apparently been arrested and executed by forces supporting the Iraqi president.

Thirdly, Saddam was hoping to postpone or hinder the implementation of the oil-for-food deal. Mohamed 'Abdel-Jabbar, the INC spokesman in London, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the deal is likely to lessen the Iraqi president's control over his people. "Saddam is using the food coupons system to further control his people. The deal, which he found himself forced to endorse under the pressure of the international community, will cancel this system," he said.

However, the oil-for-food deal may not be postponed for long, as NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana declared Sunday that the UN resolution to implement the deal is expected to come into effect soon.

The US, or more specifically the White House, was also able to make political gains. By launching 44 missiles against Iraq last week in retaliation for the Iraqi forces' drive into the northern UN safe haven and no-fly-zone, Bill Clinton

gained wider domestic support in his bid for re-election. But, on the debit side, the US lost the international unanimity that stood behind its leadership in the 1991 Gulf War.

Iraq's gains from the Kurdish clashes were no less than the Americans'. Contrary to PUK initial denial of accepting support from Iran, the party leader Jalal Talabani openly confirmed that he would accept support from any country ready to help, naming Iran at the top of the list.

The Iranian presence in the region, which was confirmed by Iraq and the KDP earlier, facilitates Iranian attempts to combat Iraq's own Kurdish dissenters, the Iranian Kurdish Democratic Party (IKDP), based in northern Iraq. The IKDP is calling for democracy in Iraq and self-rule for the Iranian Kurds.

Turkey also regarded the inter-Kurdish clashes that led to KDP victory as a punishment for the PUK. The PUK had largely provided support to the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) and allowed them to launch their attacks against the Turkish government from PUK-controlled areas. The PKK has been fighting for independence from the Turkish government for the last 12 years.

The clashes also gave Ankara a pretext for the establishment of a buffer zone on the northern border with Iraq to protect its territory from more strikes from PKK bases in northern Iraq.

Although opposed by Iraq, Iran and the KDP, Turkish Foreign Minister Tansu Ciller announced earlier this week that preparations for the buffer zone had been completed and that this would require evacuating some Kurdish residents from the zone and installing sophisticated

electronic systems along the 331km border to monitor Kurdish infiltration.

Clearly, therefore, the only losers in this crisis are the Kurds themselves. Now both Iran and Turkey will have a stronger justification to clamp down on the Kurds in both countries. The two Kurdish parties in Iraq, KDP and PUK, have effectively pinned that they are not able to establish their own independent state.

After years of struggle for independence, the PUK and KDP secured control of northern Iraq in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War under the protection of the UN. The two parties won 50 per cent of the seats in Kurdish parliamentary elections one year later. But fighting broke out over power sharing and the distribution of tax revenues in 1994.

Throughout the last three years, the two parties have tried to resolve their conflict. They signed a peace agreement in the Irish capital of Dublin last year, but failed to implement it on the ground.

However, the most significant development in this conflict is the fact that the KDP asked for support from Iraq, the former enemy who ferociously attacked and launched chemical weapons against the Kurds a few years ago.

The KDP has tried to defend its alliance with Saddam as a tactical and a short-term necessity to prevent Arbil from being taken by the PUK and its Iranian ally.

However, Iraq does not seem to consider its presence in northern Iraq as short-term. Iraq offered after the fall of Sulaymaniyah to cooperate with Ankara to keep the Turkish Kurdish rebels from crossing into Turkey from northern Iraq.

Latif Rashid, the PUK spokesman, denied that Iraq provided any support or took part in the latest conflict. "This is a mere allegation by the dictator in Iraq as an excuse to move into Arbil," he told the *Weekly*. He described the KDP alliance with Iraq as a plunder which will have negative effects on the future of all Kurds.

An Arab consensus opposing the US missile attack on Iraq signalled the demise of the Gulf War coalition, writes Samia Nkrumah

East Asian Nations — Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia — criticised US action in Iraq.

Significantly, meetings of both the European Union (EU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have failed to secure any backing for the Clinton administration's bombing of Iraq due to the different views of member states.

The EU meeting in Ireland backed the implementation of an agreement allowing Iraq to sell \$2 billion of oil every six months to buy humanitarian provisions in accordance with UN Resolution 986. However, fearing for the safety of its monitoring staff, the US suspended the oil-for-food deal last week.

In a dilemma similar to the EU's, the GCC, whose states are traditional US allies, neither condemned nor backed the US attack. France has already refused to patrol the extension, and even Britain, which was the only major Western power that enthusiastically supported the US strike, has yet to fly its planes north of the 32nd parallel. The US also pointedly failed to inform Russia, which has been categorically opposed to the use of force against Baghdad, of its plans in advance.

The anti-Iraq coalition's inability to arrive at a clear position on the Baghdad regime means that a real alliance will be difficult to form again. A week after the American attack, regional groupings are debating the crisis separately. Ahead of their meeting in Indonesia this week, three of the seven members of the Association of South

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Sanctioning genocide

The Children are Dying: The Impact of Sanctions on Iraq, Ramsey Clark, New York: World View Forum, Inc, 1996

"Economic sanctions and blockades, as now applied as the weapons of choice by the United States and by the Security Council of the United Nations at the urging of the US and its allies, are weapons of mass destruction directed at a whole people... The sanctions policy is clearly a 'Crime Against Humanity' as defined under the terms of the Nuremberg principles."

Ramsey Clark, former US attorney-general

meat, poultry, milk, eggs and fish has critically declined. Serious shortages of animal products have naturally caused galloping inflation, thereby reducing consumption. Since 1993, red meat and fish prices have increased 193 and 240 times respectively, while the price of poultry has increased about 1,000 to 2,000 times since July 1990. Under the UN sanctions, most people cannot afford to eat meat or poultry even once a week.

Moreover, the domestic production of basic food items cannot meet the national requirements. Before the war, Iraq produced about one-third of its essential food needs and spent \$2 billion annually on imports. But under the terms of the embargo, the government's ability to import foodstuffs has drastically declined due to hard currency shortages. In an effort to prevent widespread hunger because of critical food shortages and spiralling inflation — by 1995 the prices of rice, vegetable oil, milk powder and sugar had reached 4,375 to 5,500 times their pre-war levels — the government introduced a universal food rationing system. In exchange for a nominal fee, the people are given a food basket providing them with 34 per cent of the average 1987-89 per capita calorie intake. While this system has prevented the outbreak of major famines, it has not checked the spread of malnutrition and morbidity — especially affecting children and the elderly.

"More and more people spend their whole day struggling to find food for survival," says a report from the UN World Food Programme.

In March 1995, the Iraqi Ministry of Health conducted its first nutritional survey, involving 50 per cent of all children under five enrolled in kindergarten. The average height for four-year-olds was 92cm and the average weight was 17.4kg, indicating conditions of chronic malnutrition, evidenced in stunted growth and wasting, i.e. low weight in proportion to height. In addition, the ministry has reported a definite increase in the number of children born with low weights (under 2.5kg); four per cent of births in August 1990 compared with 19.2 per cent in March 1993 and 21.1 per cent in July 1995. "If you are born under two kilos, you'll have lots of aches and pains, and you probably won't live very long," commented Ramsey Clark.

Dr Jassem and other eye-witness

testimonies, along with reports by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO),

describe the impact of UN sanctions on the Iraqi people in *The Children are Dying*. Recalling the 1991 US-led war against Iraq, Ramsey Clark labelled the onslaught as "a new form of violence that hadn't been experienced on this planet". Although sounding dramatic, Clark's statement is true to fact. "In 42 days of war, US bombers alone made 110,000 aerial sorties — that is one every 30 seconds — dropping the equivalent of 7.5 Hiroshima, 88,500 tons of explosives," he wrote. In effect, the bombing was intended to destroy the life support system of Iraq. Clark, who first visited the war-torn country on 2 February 1991, recounted: "There is not a reservoir, a pumping station, a filtration plant that wasn't deliberately destroyed by US bombing to deprive the people of water." According to Clark, the destruction was about starving the people. After the military had completed their mission, there "was on a grain silo, not a food distribution centre, a food processing centre left standing in the country," said Clark, adding: "Why were they destroying fertiliser plants, fertiliser storage, insecticide storage, insecticide plants? Why were there fires in grain fields, unless you use napalm from planes or helicopters... They wanted to destroy the country's food supplies."

And destroy them they did — on a long-term basis. The FAO report states, for example, that the animal population has steeply declined since the embargo began. Between 1990 and 1995, cow production decreased by 34 per cent, buffalo production by 46 per cent, sheep production by 81 per cent. Traditionally, the Iraqi people's diet has depended heavily on meat and other livestock consumption. As a result of the unavailability of equipment and animal feed after sanctions, the production of red

meat, poultry, milk, eggs and fish has critically declined. Serious shortages of animal products have naturally caused galloping inflation, thereby reducing consumption. Since 1993, red meat and fish prices have increased 193 and 240 times respectively, while the price of poultry has increased about 1,000 to 2,000 times since July 1990. Under the UN sanctions, most people cannot afford to eat meat or poultry even once a week.

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The FAO mission visited the paediatric departments of the Saddam Hospitals in Anbar, Kerbala, Basra and Nasiriyah last year and observed that, since mid-1993, 30 per cent of all children treated there were admitted for diagnosed malnutrition.

Severe wasting, especially visible in the ribs and limbs, along with "old-man faces", was observed in children with marasmus — a debilitating condition especially affecting infants which results in a severe loss of body fat and strength. Describing her visit to a children's hospital in Baghdad last year, journalist Kathryn Casa documented such a case. "In one room was a young mother standing over her child who was too weak to do much more than whimper, his abdomen swollen to the size of a large lemon... This four-month-old baby boy, whose country sits atop some of the largest known oil reserves in the world, was starving to death," wrote Casa. In fact, child mortality has increased nearly five-fold, if one compares the rate prior to the embargo with the rate observed during the past five years. The FAO mission concluded that 567,000 Iraqi children have died as a direct consequence of economic sanctions. In the words of Dr Jassem, sanctions represent "silent starvation, killing and murder, but in the middle of the day where all the world is watching silently".

Reviewed by Faiza Rady



Yeltsin scheming till the end

Russia wrestles in the shadow of an ailing Yeltsin, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

Russian President Boris Yeltsin is to undergo a heart bypass operation later in September and it appears likely that he will informally hand over power to Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin. The ailing 65-year-old president is suffering from the effects of ischemic heart disease, caused by a platelet build-up inside the arteries and veins. Ischemia reduces the blood flow to and from the heart, and doctors say privately that Yeltsin's chances of survival are very slim. Still, the Russian president soldiers on and is enjoying a game of intrigue where he keeps his people guessing who his successor might be.

Yeltsin, in direct contradiction to his doctors' predictions, has so far survived heart trouble and much heartache. Yeltsin was twice hospitalised with serious heart problems in 1995, but he did not transfer power on either occasion. His condition is now critical and is characterised by poor flow of blood to the heart and brain accompanied by severe pain. According to the 1993 Russian Constitution, if a president dies or is permanently incapacitated, the prime minister must take over and call new elections within three months.

Meanwhile, Chernomyrdin met with Yeltsin's security chief, Aleksandr Lebed, last Monday. Yeltsin's chief of staff, Anatoly Chubais,

was consulted, too, and briefed about Yeltsin's deteriorating condition.

As Yeltsin struggles for life, Russian troops continued to pull out of Chechnya. Russian and separatist Chechen commanders met on Monday to work out details of the peace deal reached by Lebed and top separatist commander Aslan Maskhadov last month. While several previous pacts have collapsed, Lebed's deal appears to hold the best chance for peace.

Above, Chechen warriors in a show of defiance, brandish their weapons about. (photo: AFP)

Elections hold little hope for Bosnia

The furore surrounding the Bosnian general elections is taking the war-torn Balkans by storm

This week tens of thousands of Bosnian refugees in Croatia, Federal Yugoslavia and other European states registered to cast their ballots in Bosnia's general election, ahead of the main polling day scheduled for 14 September, reports **Yassim Al-Ahram**. Meanwhile, incidents of racially motivated violence and electoral irregularities are on the increase, suggesting that the ethnic hostility that fuelled four years of civil war in the former Yugoslavia continues, in peace-time, to hamper preparations for the multi-party elections. In an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*, the Bosnian ambassador to Cairo, Avdija Hadrovic, spoke of his concerns over the impending elections, which he fears may amount to the continued destruction of Bosnia by non-military means.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is organising and monitoring Bosnia's countrywide elections, which will be held under the terms of the Dayton peace accords, signed last November. The accords brought peace to the war-torn region and sought to foster reconciliation between Serbs, Muslims and Croats. They divided Bosnia into two sectors, one Serb-controlled and the other under the auspices of the Muslim-Croat Federation, separated by an administrative demarcation line known as the Interim Boundary Line (IBL). As stipulated at Dayton, Bosnian voters will choose a three-member collective presidency, a joint legislative and entity-level parliaments. But, as Hadrovic made clear to the *Weekly*, a number of factors hamper the election process in the Bosnian state.

Not least, four years of bloody conflict still loom in the public's mind, making many Bosnian voters, at home and abroad, distrustful of the multi-ethnic messages of opposition political parties. The ruling nationalist parties, dedicated to the separate interests of Muslims, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Serbs and advocating ethnic-based policies, hold a firm lead in the polls.

Opposition groups which reject such ethnic-based policies and call for a united Bosnia trail the ruling parties in the polls by a wide margin. Among these is the Muslim Party for Bosnia-Herzegovina, headed by Harris Silajdzic, the former Bosnian prime minister and main candidate for the presidency after Alija Izetbegovic. The Joint List, which consists of a coalition of five centre-left opposition parties that preach ethnic unity and attempt to reach out to Bosnia's Serb and Croat communities, has yet to strike a chord with a wider Bosnian audience.

Of most concern to the ambassador is the fact that the Dayton accords' 12 conditions for holding an election have not yet been met. Though the fighting has ceased, what he calls the "civilian" preconditions remain unaddressed. These include freedom of expression, association and movement; freedom of the press and television; and, most importantly, the return of refugees. None of these conditions appears to have been fulfilled on the ground.

Instead, there are reports of the harassment of returning refugees, expulsions and the fierce intimidation of political opposition on all sides, including the bombing of people's homes. Reports last week suggested that Bosnian Serbs were targeting Muslims in Broko in a campaign to drive non-Serbs from this strategic area. There is no freedom of movement between the two zones. This week witnessed increased violence in areas near the IBL, where Muslims have crossed into Serb-held areas to resettle in their pre-war villages. In the Serb- and Croat-dominated parts little political opposition is permitted, and political debate has been virtually stifled. Only Sarajevo permits the activities of its prominent political opposition group, the Party of Bosnia-Herzegovina, whose leader Silajdzic vehemently condemns election irregularities.

The ruling nationalist parties are further strengthened in their dominant position through their control of local media and infrastructure. Opposition groups currently have no access to an independent media through which to promote their electoral message. Radio and television controlled by the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the largest of the Bosnian Muslim parties, reportedly ignore the activities of opposition groups and often fail to report on numerous attacks and intimidation at their party rallies.

In particular, Hadrovic drew attention to the evidence of Bosnian-Serb abuse of procedures for voter registration, which last month brought condemnation from the OSCE and resulted in the postponement of municipal elections. Under the Dayton agreement, the election registration forms enable voters to state their desire to vote in a town they have nominated as their future home. Many Serb voters have, as a result, been encouraged to register in strategic towns in Serb-held Bosnia that before the war had a non-Serb majority.

By influencing voter registration in areas such as Srebrenica, where a Serb minority is driving out a pre-war Muslim majority, the Bosnian Serbs appear to be using local elections to enshrine ethnic divisions.

Bosnian President Izetbegovic has threatened to boycott elections unless the international community agrees to work only with those parties adhering to the conditions of the Dayton accords.

The multi-party elections — seven are scheduled to be held — are seen by America and its European allies as a necessary precondition for reviving economic links between the different parts of Bosnia and as a precursor to their own gradual military disengagement from the region. However, in the run-up to the Bosnian elections, the Dayton agreement is coming up against the ethnic tensions it sought to resolve. The Bosnian ambassador expressed his grave concern that while the Dayton agreement was intended to cement the country's multi-ethnic character, it may instead serve to legitimate Serb gains made during the war through violence and ethnic cleansing. If this were the case, he said, it would be "a killing of Bosnia".

There seems to be no clearer illustration of the troubled situation in Bosnia than the announcement last week that the country's three communities are working with international agencies to agree on protected "voter routes" between Muslim and Serb areas, to prevent bloodshed next week. Thousands of Bosnians are expected to cross the former frontier to cast their ballots. Though the OSCE has chosen to proceed with the elections on schedule in spite of Bosnian Muslim protests against violations of the Dayton accords, NATO was last week considering scrapping plans for the withdrawal of troops from Bosnia by the November deadline, amid fears that war will erupt as soon as the scheduled pull-out is completed.

While international intervention may have put an end to the fighting in Bosnia, it seems to have come only a short way towards resolving the underlying problems which initially sparked the conflict and which now hamper international efforts at constructing a lasting peace.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**

Slovenia seeks to further its economic development by becoming a full member of the EU. In terms of economic indicators alone, it should have been the most likely candidate of all, but the EU chooses its candidates largely on the basis of political considerations. Slovenia's problems in achieving closer ties with the EU are largely based on the EU's policy towards the former Yugoslavia'

Yugoslavia's break-up were quite serious for Slovenia. The country lost 20 per cent of its markets overnight. The Soviet Union had crumbled, and economic recession all over the former Soviet bloc further diminished Slovenia's traditional markets.

Slovenia's GDP per capita dropped to \$6,600 in 1992 and many large industrial systems were on the brink of bankruptcy. The country had also inherited a 250 per cent inflation. Unemployment quickly rose to 12 per cent.

To maintain a balanced budget and to curb inflation, the government introduced strict savings measures, limited money supply and aggressively sought political alliances in the European Union to acquire additional markets for the Slovene economy. Legislation which firmly established a market economy had been largely introduced before the formal declaration of independence, and privatisation was initiated after a somewhat lengthy parliamentary procedure.

Slovenia is now generally seen as making a solid economic recovery. Its 1995 GDP per capita was estimated at \$9,300 and inflation has dropped to below 10 per cent. Its foreign currency reserves are still on the increase though the pace has slowed; at the close of 1995, Slovenia's foreign currency reserves touched \$3.5 billion or \$1,750 per capita, which is way above world average.

By the end of 1995, Slovenia had also managed to reach a settlement with most of the creditors of the former Yugoslavia. The country agreed to accept approximately 15 per cent of the SFRY's foreign debt, which brought Slovenia's external debt to \$2.1 billion. However, the settlement brought a sizeable increase in the country's credit ratings and gave it better access to foreign loans and in-

The writer is head of the statistics centre at the Joseph Stefan Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

مكتبة الأصل

NAM supports Iraq

REPRESENTATIVES of 49 Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) nations, meeting in the Nigerian capital Abuja last week, expressed support for the Iraqi people and criticised recent American missile attacks on Iraqi military installations.

The meeting was the fifth conference of NAM information and culture ministers. The participants also urged the US to "put an end to the economic, commercial and financial measures that intensify the embargo against Cuba," and appealed to Washington to end its "aggressive radio and television transmissions against Cuba".

On the Middle East, the conference's final communiqué said NAM nations "reiterated their demand for the withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Palestinian and other Arab lands".

Helms-Burton law

LATIN American and Caribbean leaders meeting last week in the Bolivian capital La Paz denounced the controversial US Helms-Burton law designed to cut foreign investment in Cuba. In a statement, presidents and other representatives of the 14-nation grouping called the Group of Rio declared the Helms-Burton law, which calls for US sanctions against non-US companies doing business in Cuba, to be a contravention of international law.

Cuba, which is not a Group of Rio member, sent its ambassador to Bolivia, Carmen Herrera, to the summit. The US sent its UN ambassador, Madeleine Albright.

The Helms-Burton law, enacted in March, is designed to tighten the US embargo against Cuba by slapping sanctions on non-US companies doing business with assets seized in the 1959 Cuban Revolution. The US's European allies have severely criticised America for the law.

Also on the meeting's agenda was economic integration in Latin America.

Africa fights crime

LAST week top police officials from all over Africa met in Harare, Zimbabwe's capital, for a three-day conference. Topping the agenda was an attempt to map out strategies for combating white-collar crimes plaguing the continent's ailing economy. Delegates from 23 English-speaking African states took part in the meeting — a follow-up to a conference held on the same subject last year in Tanzania.

The conference was addressed by officials from the international police organisation, Interpol, which opened a southern African regional office in Zimbabwe last month, and from Zimbabwe's banking sector, which has increasingly been the victim of white-collar crimes over the last few years.

Opening the conference, Zimbabwe's Home Affairs Minister Dumiso Dabengwa said rising white-collar crimes were stifling efforts to implement economic reform programmes in Africa. The minister argued that the activities of international crime syndicates continued unabated across borders largely due to weak legislation, the absence of extradition agreements and stiffer red tape, which frustrates the speedy movement of law enforcement officers from one country to another.

South Africa is a case in point. Only two years after embracing democracy, it has become a major transit point on the worldwide money-laundering highway. According to the police's commercial crime branch, at least 85 organised crime syndicates, half of which have foreign links, are operating in the country and were involved in fraud, theft and commercial operations worth about 5.18 million rand (\$1.4 million) in 1995.

Last Saturday, the leaders of southern African countries signed a series of protocols binding them to trade liberalisation and the fight against drug trafficking. Four protocols were signed at the annual summit of the Southern African Development Community. One of them was about combating illegal drug trafficking. Southern Africa has in recent years become a safe route for drugs destined for Europe and the US.

Ton-to-one against US

THIS week Okinawa voted more than 10 to one in favour of a reduction of US military bases in Japan's southernmost prefecture. Okinawa houses more than half of the 47,000 American troops stationed in the country and three-quarters of the American military facilities on Japanese territory. Okinawa is also Japan's poorest region, and the estimated \$18 billion pumped into the local economy by the American bases is its second biggest source of revenue after tourism.

The Okinawan vote came one year after the rape of a 12-year-old Okinawan girl by three American servicemen. The incident led to the largest anti-American protests ever in Japan. Even though the island makes up less than one per cent of Japan's area, Okinawa's proximity to China, Taiwan, Korea and the Philippines makes it a linchpin of American strategic policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

Khmer Rouge split

HUNDREDS of Cambodian government troops have been sent to join dissident "moderate" Khmer Rouge guerrillas in repelling an attack by hardline Khmer Rouge forces loyal to the notorious Pol Pot. The operation was the first of its kind since the Khmer Rouge split last month into two factions, one loyal to top leader Pol Pot, and the other to his henchman Ieng Sary. The latter met with Cambodian co-organizers of defence, generals Tea Banh and Tea Channath in neighbouring Thailand last week.

A lifelong communist, Sary was foreign minister of Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, when the Khmer Rouge was in power and caused the death of as many as two million Cambodians through starvation and mass executions.

India remains defiant

THE UNITED Nations General Assembly convened on Monday to adopt a global nuclear test ban treaty after India again insisted that it would not allow others to dictate its nuclear policy.

Under the current rules, India can prevent the treaty from coming into force by refusing to sign, but risks international isolation by continuing to reject the treaty, which has the explicit backing of all five declared nuclear powers — Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

India, which carried out a nuclear explosion in 1974, denies possessing nuclear weapons and maintains that its nuclear research is geared towards peaceful purposes. India was the only country to vote last month against the test-ban treaty at the Geneva disarmament talks.

French-Pacific détente

FRANCE and the South Pacific Forum, which groups 16 independent Pacific Ocean island nations, emerged from talks last Sunday to begin a new era of cordial relations after a period of hostilities caused by French nuclear testing in the Mururoa atoll.

The talks followed last week's South Pacific Forum summit in Majuro in the Marshall Islands, which decided France could revive its special relationship with the forum — suspended last year. The forum includes Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea.



NUR MISUARI, the chairman of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), signed a peace accord with the Philippine government last week. The deal called for the setting up of a MNLF-led Southern Philippines Council for Peace and Development (SPCPD). The SPCPD will be the precursor of an expanded autonomous region in southern Philippines to be set up three years later and composed of provinces that will vote in a plebiscite to join it.

Misuari is a former university professor who launched a bloody rebellion for Muslim self-rule in the southern Philippines island of Mindanao. The uprising cost more than 120,000 lives. Misuari was elected as governor of the southern Philippines a couple of days ago. As the only candidate for regional governor, all Misuari needed was one vote — either his own or that of either of his two wives — to claim victory in the elections to a semi-autonomous region covering four predominantly Muslim governors in the southern Philippines. But, Christian settlers have opposed the deal, fearing it would lead to MNLF political ascendancy in a region Muslims regard as their ancestral homeland. Christian settlers who dominate the economy of the region are raising objections to Misuari's plans (photo: AFP)

Sweden's winning ways

Can Hammarskjöld-like Swedes win round the wildest of Islamists, wonders **Gamal Nkrumah**

Per Gahron embodies the stereotypical Swedish personality. I met him in a passageway deep in the bowels of the maze-like corridors of the European Parliament building in Strasbourg, France. I heard "politically correct" people sing his praises: a Dag Hammarskjöld in the making. He has authored several books on the plight of the Palestinians, particularly those of Gaza. Unfortunately, there are many in the Third World who see Swedish and other Scandinavian overtures towards Palestinians and other underdogs from the South as new Western ways of treating Third Worldists as fools. Oslo did not help.

Sweden, together with Norway, was largely responsible for initiating the now rather discredited Oslo accords. Sweden is now a full-fledged member of the European Union; its traditional role as the acceptable and understanding face of the West is in question. To put it bluntly: is Sweden still the somewhat mawkish Northern champion of neutrality and Third World interests? Is Sweden still seen as different from other Western nations? "Yes and no," Gahron said. He is an accomplished parliamentarian who wishes to be something more than a Swedish representative of the Greens in the European Parliament. He makes observations about the Middle East that go beyond the individual statements made to him by both Israelis and Palestinians. Gahron and a long list of wise and warm Swedes are simultaneously both architects and assets of Sweden's foreign policy in the Middle East, Africa, Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Sweden was never a colonial power — that helps.

History, too, helps. In 1948, Sweden's Count Bernadotte was assassinated while serving as United Nations mediator in Palestine. In 1961, the then Swedish UN secretary-general, Dag Hammarskjöld, was killed attempting to mediate between warring factions in the Congo, present-day Zaire. Sweden has a history of mediation in conflicts. Swedes are great believers in preventive diplomacy. Sweden, along with Denmark and Norway, was a key donor country that championed development in Africa. It went along with funding projects that were meant to alleviate the suffering caused by the implementation of the World Bank's and International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment programmes.

Can Sweden, and Scandinavia, come up with a winning formula for peace and prosperity after the widely perceived failure of Oslo and after widespread dissatisfaction with Africa's development record? In the Arab world, as in Africa, it has become customary to expect a special kind of conscientiousness from the Swedes. The Scandinavians are widely acclaimed as trustworthy. Other Westerners are not.

It is probably for this reason that the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies cooperated with the Swedish Foreign Ministry to stage a seminar on strengthening understanding between Europe and the Muslim world. Is it so hard to educate Europeans about Islam, Muslims and Islamists? The seminar is part of the Euro-Islam lecture series, general Tea Banh and Tea Channath in neighbouring Thailand last week.

A lifelong communist, Sary was foreign minister of Cambodia from 1975 to 1979, when the Khmer Rouge was in power and caused the death of as many as two million Cambodians through starvation and mass executions.

Imagine, if you will, that you are the incumbent US president, with less than 80 days to election time. You have been lambasted by the press, more often than not, for having questionable morals. Some of your key business associates have been convicted of fraud, your wife is under scrutiny for her role in a shady land deal and you are facing a sexual harassment suit left over from your days as Arkansas governor. Yet, at the same time, as leader of a country that is at its most conservative since the 1920s, you choose to run on a values campaign, effectively rendering the difference between you and your Republican opponent, at least in ideological terms, to a near-nill margin. In short, you are Bill Clinton and, to add insult to injury, your chief political adviser, Dick Morris, has just resigned due to a story about his alleged trysts with a \$200-a-time call girl. What do you do?

One solution is to target Saddam Hussein, America's public enemy number one, by launching dozens of Tomahawk cruise missiles at selected air defence installations in southern Iraq. The result: your approval rating, according to some polls, rockets to 80 per cent. But how long will the honeymoon last?

The long-term impact of this move, with regard to the elections, is negligible," says political consultant Tyler Reekert. "Clinton has temporarily managed to give the impression that he is as callous and tough as Reagan or Bush, but that's just it — temporarily."

The White House, for its part, asserts that US "allies in the region expect the US to behave as a superpower, as the security guarantee, in a very unstable region," according to the statement of one White House official last week. But many Americans reject this idea, arguing instead that the US has too long tried to act as the "world's policeman".

"It's time that we looked at bringing home the values that made

project, yet another brainchild of the exponents of Sweden's North-South agenda. There are 250,000 Muslims in Sweden today; 25 years ago we had none," said Lars Lönnbäck, former Swedish ambassador to Jordan and currently head of the Euro-Islam project. Sweden is wooing Islamists, "but only of the moderate variety," he stressed. The magic word is "moderate" — and Sweden is renowned for its moderation.

Moderate Muslims were invited, willy-nilly, to join Sweden's new Euro-Islam project, which was launched at an international conference in the Swedish capital Stockholm in September 1995. Esmael Abdellatif, the secretary-general of the Arab League, Fahmy Howsy, deputy editor of the Al-Ahram, Saadeddin Ibrahim, president of Cairo's Ibn Khaldun Centre for Development Studies, Asma Jahangir, chairwoman of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, Fatima Mernissi, the Moroccan feminist and sociologist, and Abdulah Bin Omer Nassef, vice-chairman of Saudi Arabia's Shura Council, were among the many distinguished participants. The Islamists are splintered and uncoordinated, but this does not necessarily mean that they are not in touch with each other," Lönnbäck told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "Networking is very important for the Euro-Islam project."

Last week's seminar in Cairo was on a smaller scale. Mats Karlsson, state secretary of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed his country's delegation. Abdel-Moneim Said, head of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, chaired the meeting. Karlsson was last in Egypt 19 years ago when he was only 21. Fluent in Czech, English, French, German, Russian and his native Scandinavian languages of Swedish, Norwegian and Danish, Karlsson exudes youthful enthusiasm, charm and a sharp intellect. He was chief economist in the Swedish Foreign Ministry's Department for International Development Cooperation. He was the head of the Planning, Sector and Education Division at the Swedish International Development Authority's office in Tanzania. I quizzed him on the authority's experience in the developing countries of the South especially in Africa.

"Support for the African National Congress' fight against apartheid was one of Scandinavia's winning ideas," Karlsson said defensively. He had helped the anti-apartheid freedom fighters in the camps in Tanzania. Sweden did not fail Africa; others did. "America is a billion dollars in arrears to the World Bank," Karlsson said. "The UN is in a deep financial mess because America does not pay its dues." Karlsson has authored many works including the *Economic Survey of the Baltic States*, with Brian van Arkadie, (1992) and *Transformation and Integration: Shaping the Future of Central and Eastern Europe* (1995). A musical with the Stockholm Philharmonic Orchestra before he became a politician, Karlsson disclosed that he is now working on an Africa project that is to be officially launched by the Swedish Foreign Min-

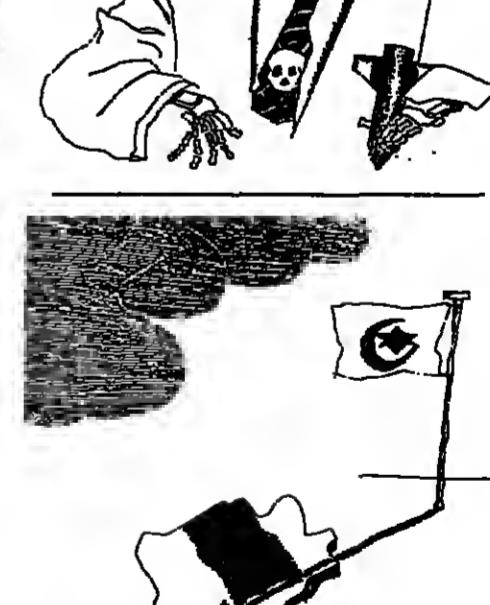
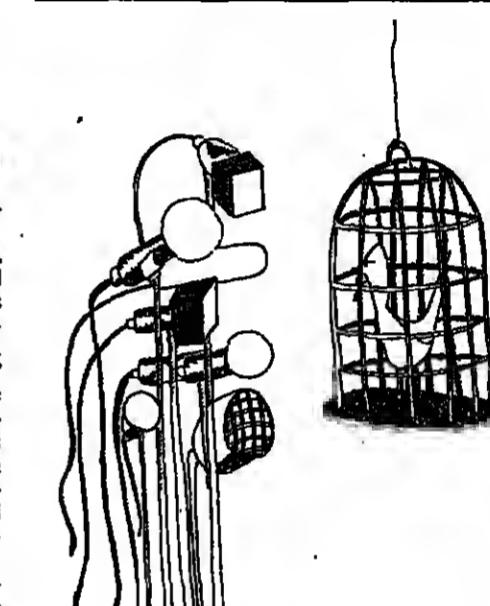
istry early next year — another North-South initiative.

During the seminar, Mohamed El-Sayed Said, deputy head of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, reminded the participants that Nobel laureate Gunnar Myrdal, the guru of development economics in the 1950s, was Swedish. "We must avoid false universalism at all costs," Said said. "Islam is textual and post-oriented." He pointed out that there was Arab Islam and non-Arab Islam and claimed that non-Arab Islam was becoming ever more important in the international arena. "Swedes have a legacy of being peace-makers and peacekeepers," Saadeddin Ibrahim told the participants. But Swedes cannot mediate between Arab and non-Arab Muslims.

Creeping alienation in Western societies, symbolised by the rise of neo-Nazism, echoes the rise of militant Islam in the Muslim heartlands. Ibrarib El-Bayoumi Ghannam, a self-styled Islamist theoretician, explained that Islamists are rethinking the traditional dualistic concept of *Dar Al-Islam* (the Islamic world) and *Dar Al-Harb* (the non-Muslim world where propagation of Islam through violence is legitimate). The world of contemporary Islam is not divided into black and white; it is all shades of grey. "What we have now is *Dar Al-Mithaq* and *Dar Al-Ahd*. The whole world has become *Dar Al-Ahd*," he said. Ghannam was referring to the concept of the non-Muslim world being an area where Islam should be propagated through constitutional means.

"Islamists in Europe speak in an idiom familiar to Middle Eastern Islamists. Yet they operate under very different circumstances," Karlsson explained. Hassan Hanafi told the Swedes: "We are yearning for social change not security. Globalism is historically linked to hegemony by the West. We want an equal partnership, *de jure* as well as *de facto*. Otherwise multilateralism cannot work." Karlsson praised Hanafi's "dialectic brilliance" and at that point the seminar sounded like an academic discussion. It took the intervention of a businessman — Mohamed Ragab, president of the Alexandria Businessmen's Association — to bring it down to earth. "The support of the business community for such an endeavour is critical," he said.

Sherif Dewar of the Alexandria Businessmen's Association drew several parallels between Islamic civilisation and the West. Key among these were the individualistic orientation of the two civilisations and their conceptualisation of win-lose situations. "We want to see a win-win option prevail in both the Islamic and Western worlds," Dewar said. Karlsson was impressed. "That was the most remarkable statement I've heard today," he said. "Win-win is a very important concept that can organise discussion around the Euro-Islam project." At this point, the Swedish ambassador to Egypt, Christer Sylven, chimed in: "The Swedish consulate in Alexandria is another winning idea." He was referring to the beautiful seaside villa that is destined to house the Euro-Islam project.



gress on a wave of domestic reforms, while charting about isolationism. The Clinton-Dole race, in turn, has focused on issues like abortion, immigrants' rights, tax cuts, a balanced budget and family values. Painfully absent from discussions during both party conventions last month was foreign policy.

In this regard, Dole is no different from Clinton. "I am here to say to America: do not abandon the great traditions that stretch to the dawn of our history; do not topple the pillars of those beliefs — God, family honour, duty, country — that have brought us through time and time again," said Dole in a speech late last month. And although the Republican presidential candidate was "four-square behind" the men and women in uniform, he was quick to take a back-handed swipe at Clinton's leadership abilities. "We probably shouldn't have to be doing what we're doing," he added.

When it comes to explaining why the American voters lauded Clinton's move, it was the poet, writer and two-time Pulitzer Prize winner Stephen Vincent Benét who best characterised the spirit of America: "This land unsatisfied by little ways".

"Packaging the bombing as a victory for democracy, freedom and integrity — those values that Americans hold to be fundamental to the socio-political fabric of their society — is just another example of how grandiose a small step can be made to look," said one Republican Party member. "Saddam just happened to be the most convenient target who came around at a particularly convenient time."

Clinton's vote cruise

A bomb a day will keep the Republicans at bay, or so hopes Bill Clinton, writes **Tarek El-Tablawy**

Imagine, if you will, that you are the incumbent US president, with less than 80 days to election time. You have been lambasted by the press, more often than not, for having questionable morals. Some of your key business associates have been convicted of fraud, your wife is under scrutiny for her role in a shady land deal and you are facing a sexual harassment suit left over from your days as Arkansas governor. Yet, at the same time, as leader of a country that is at its most conservative since the 1920s, you choose to run on a values campaign, effectively rendering the difference between you and your Republican opponent, at least in ideological terms, to a near-nill margin. In short, you are Bill Clinton and, to add insult to injury, your chief political adviser, Dick Morris, has just resigned due to a story about his alleged trysts with a \$200-a-time call girl. What do you do?

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The White House, for its part, asserts that US "allies in the region expect the US to behave as a superpower, as the security guarantee, in a very unstable region," according to the statement of one White House official last week. But many Americans reject this idea, arguing instead that the US has too long tried to act as the "world's policeman".

"It's time that we looked at bringing home the values that made

this country great," says David Emrick, a computer programmer in Colorado. "We don't want a guy who's trying to imitate Rambo but who doesn't have the guts to do the job right," he quipped.

Clinton's attack on Hussein was, as Clinton put it, intended "to make Saddam pay a price for his latest brutality — and increase America's ability to contain Iraq over the long run".

That Hussein is unpopular in the US is not only an understatement, it is a given. However, it is questionable just how much the voters, not to mention the members of the Republican Party, buy into Clinton's containment strategy. Arizona Senator John McCain blasted the president's foreign policy, stating that it was "a complete failure" and that gains accrued after the Gulf War had been squandered by his "reckless, photo-op foreign policy".

The bombings may have been popular with the voters," said Sanders of Houston, Texas, "but in the end, they are not what's going to make or break him. Nor will they do much to boost his image."

Dale Meyers of Wilmette, Illinois, claims that "Clinton is still going to be seen as the man who was vacillating between gradualism and moderation, but ended up on the extremist side and, therefore, is no different from [Republican presidential candidate Bob] Dole. Bombing Saddam is a last-ditch effort. Everyone sees it, everyone knows it, no one buys it."

Then why the soaring popularity for the move? "Americans love the pomp and circumstance of realpolitik," says political analyst Ed Hansen. "But especially now, Americans don't want to see US troops getting involved in an all-out conflict on foreign shores. There's too much to be done here, at home."

That much was clear two years ago when the Republicans, led by House Speaker Newt Gingrich, stormed Capitol Hill, riding into Con-

Private partnership for public interest

The US-Egyptian economic partnership is still in the troubleshooting phase. But once the obstacles are removed, writes **M. Shafik Gabr**, the prospects are enormous

The high hopes raised one year ago by the formation of the Presidents' Council to advise on policies and initiatives aimed at enhancing the business relationship between the US and Egypt are largely being realised. Significant advances have been made in a number of fundamental areas which are important for promoting trade and an investment-friendly environment.

As a member of the Egyptian delegation to the Council, I have seen a remarkable development in the level of understanding between the two sides. We have each realised that the differences in our approaches are governed primarily by cultural differences, not disagreements on the goals.

Some quarters on the Egyptian side, for example, expected the Council to be a catalyst for spectacular breakthroughs on macroeconomic issues, such as a free trade agreement. The Americans expected the Council simply to pave the way for the expansion of their business operations in Egypt.

Once this difference was recognised and accommodated, progress has been swift and a momentum has been built up which makes me even more optimistic about what the Council can achieve in its second year of operation.

Much came out of the Council's July meeting in Washington, which was marked by a joint presentation to President Mubarak and Vice President Al Gore by the Egyptian and American delegations. But again, the list of tasks we agreed on for the Council's second year was based on finding practical solutions to practical problems, on climbing hills, rather than on attempting to scale political mountains. While we Egyptians certainly want a free trade agreement, we cannot force it to happen — the Council is an advisory, not executive, body.

We must, instead, try to show the US that it is in its own interests to draw up a free trade agreement. And, through the work of the Council and other bodies, including the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt, we can help prove that assertion.

Let me illustrate this with four issues which the Presidents' Council is now responsible for examining during the coming months:

1- Protection of Egyptian intellectual rights in the US

There is a large Egyptian and Arab population in the US. This means that there is a lucrative market for Egyptian films and recordings. However, our movies, CDs and cassettes have been pirated for years in the US. The Council, in cooperation with US federal agencies, is now seeking ways to introduce control measures and means of enforcing Egyptian intellectual property rights in the US.

2- Training Egyptian Managers

The economic system in this country for many years insulated Egyptian business from the real world. We now have an urgent need to train our people in order for our commerce and industry to compete in world markets. In short, we must create a new business ethic in Egypt. Therefore, the Council has decided to develop a programme of 3-6 month internships for Egyptian middle managers with companies in the US, thereby exposing them to what is going on in the real world and helping equip them with the skills they will need.

3- Commercial Arbitration Processes

The system for settling commercial disputes in both countries is cumbersome, expensive and time-wasting. The Council is now charged with the task of finding ways to solve such disputes both quickly and with maximum transparency.

4- Patent Rights for Pharmaceuticals

This is an issue which the American delegation identified and which the Council will now tackle. It is a technical problem since US patent holders are entitled to recoup the expense of, and to profit from, their pharmaceutical inventions.

However, World Trade Organisation (WTO) regulations allow for a term protection prior to implementation. Regardless of how this issue is resolved, it is critical that we liberalise and deregulate the Egyptian economy, we must be rigorous in our efforts to keep the cost of health care down.

Addressing these issues does not mean that the ultimate goal of a free trade agreement is no longer a part of the Council's agenda. In fact, at our July meeting, we agreed to set up a working group to identify the impediments on the road to such an agreement, and we shall continue to work to remove those obstacles. This process requires highly detailed, meticulous and lengthy work, and it is not easy. But I believe that we shall indeed achieve that ultimate goal in the next two years — to the enormous benefit of both the US and Egypt.

The writer is president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt.

The big return begins

Following Saudi Arabia's lead, other Gulf Arab countries are gradually scaling down their foreign labour force, leaving many Egyptians worried about their future. **Mona El-Fiqi** reports

In the 1970s began a wave of labour migration to oil-rich Arab countries that was to transform the face of Egypt, economically and socially, and some even suggest, politically. Remittances from Egyptians working in the Arab Gulf states, Iraq and Libya became a major foreign currency earner, and during the past two decades millions of Egyptians have crossed the country's borders back and forth from the Gulf.

But the changing economic conditions within these countries, coupled with the introduction of new labour regulations aimed at reducing the number of foreign workers, may mean that fewer opportunities will be available in the coming years, to Egyptians.

Abdel-Qader El-Assar, a counsellor for international cooperation at the Egyptian Ministry of Manpower and Immigration, said that "while the number of Egyptians working in other Arab countries was estimated at 2.2 million in 1995, this figure is expected to decline steadily over the next few years".

Ministry of Manpower records reveal that the number of Egyptians working in Saudi Arabia in 1995 totalled 1.2 million, but in 1996, this figure dropped to 900,000 as a result of new regulations implemented this year.

The decline, however, is not only in the number of job op-

portunities available, but also in the salaries. The drop in salaries is mainly due to an increase in the supply of labour that has not been matched by demand for foreign labour in the Arab countries, noted El-Assar.

"Most of the Arab governments began to regulate [the level of] foreign labour in an attempt to replace it with domestic labour," he said.

There is, however, another side to the problems. Ac-

cording to a study prepared by Hamdy Abdel-Azim, dean of the Suez Academy for Administrative Sciences, Tanta branch, the reason behind the decrease in the number of Egyptians working in Arab countries is a growing preference for Asian labourers, who may be willing to work for lower salaries than Egyptians.

By slashing salaries, the Gulf Arab countries are trying to chase away Egyptian workers. Abdel-Azim's study also

points out that these countries are trying to make openings for local workers. Since the 1970s, the governments of these countries began to send their youth to study at European and American universities in order to prepare them for leadership roles. Therefore, argues Abdel-Azim, by the year 2025, domestic-tired labour will have increased from 47 to 61 per cent in the Arab countries.

The study adds that the rea-

son for the declining demand for foreign labour is also financial. A drop in oil prices in the 1980s led to a reduced rate of economic growth in these countries. Consequently, the governments of the Gulf Arab countries were forced to borrow extensively from domestic and international sources in order to finance their budget deficit. Moreover, sluggish economic growth rates meant that the number of investment and construction

projects, which were traditionally the life-blood for many Egyptians working in Arab countries, have been drastically reduced.

Also contributing to the decline is the fact that many of these Arab countries spent much of their oil wealth in recent wars. For example, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait cost the surrounding Arab countries roughly \$60 billion. And, during the eight-year Iran-Iraq War, Iraq spent nearly \$159 billion.

When coupled with an average unemployment rate of 4 per cent in the six Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, a figure which Abdel-Azim expects to increase in the next few years, the picture looks grim for Egyptian workers in particular.

Figures reported in Abdel-Azim's study reveal that roughly 300,000 Egyptians working in Arab countries return to Egypt permanently every year. Again, this figure is expected to increase over the next few years.

As more Egyptians return home, Egypt will be faced with some dire social and economic problems, the most obvious of which is that the country's domestic labour force will drastically increase.

On a more positive note, the study argued that the return of Egyptians will provide the domestic market with a 'boost' since many of these workers are highly experienced.

Unlikely destinations

AS A RESULT of the decrease in the number of job opportunities in the Gulf states, Egyptian workers are heading to other destinations such as Israel in search of work.

According to Lior Ben-Dor, the press attaché at the Israeli Embassy in Cairo, while the Israeli government has no accurate record of the number of Egyptians working in Israel, they are estimated to total about 5,000. The majority of these workers are employed illegally, having arrived on tourist visas or through other Arab countries like Jordan and Lebanon.

"According to Israeli law, the minimum wage is nearly \$600, a figure which is considered quite decent for Egyptians working in Israel primarily in the construction and food services fields," he stated.

However, given that approximately 100,000 foreigners are working in Israel illegally, "the Israeli government is trying to regulate foreign labour," stated Ben-Dor. "Any worker who does not have a work permit can be imprisoned."

While this does not bode well for any foreigner working in Israel without a legal work permit or contract, for Egyptians, the situation is even more complicated. A well-informed source at the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that all Egyptians working in Israel are doing so illegally since there is no form of labour cooperation between the two neighbouring countries.

Nonetheless, this has not stopped thousands of Egyptians from taking the chance. Often entering Israel through Eilat, where there is no visa re-

quirement, Egyptian blue-collar workers are drawn by the salaries and easy access.

In a bid to curb this phenomenon, the General Division for Recruitment Companies at the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce (EFCC) sent a memo to all recruitment companies prohibiting dealings with Israel. Some companies received a number of Israeli contracts for Egyptian workers, but the EFCC has remained adamantly opposed to any commercial ties with Israel, including recruitment efforts.

Mohamed Abul-Magid, head of the General Division for Recruitment Companies at the EFCC, said that Egyptians are looking for work in Israel because the salaries are more than double those paid in the Gulf states.

Reforms bring market rebirth

Participants in a conference on the Egyptian capital market were eager to highlight the progress made on the economic reform front, reports **Shereen Abdel-Razek**

A conference entitled "Egyptian Capital Markets and Investment", which was attended by Egyptian officials, leading Egyptian and foreign economists and prominent businessmen, spotlighted the Egyptian market's strong performance on the micro and macro levels. The two-day international conference included a series of workshops, seminars and discussions, and was organised by Euromoney Publications, a European publishing firm which puts out the magazine, *Euromoney*.

"The 21st Century in Egypt, has begun in 1996," said Youssef Boutros-Ghali, minister of state for economic affairs. "The Egypt of 1996 has multiplied its strength a thousand-fold. We are on the threshold of the last phase of the reform programme and our economy is in good financial health."

Boutros-Ghali outlined the reasons behind his optimism. Foremost was that the country's budget deficit, which last year stood at 1.3 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), is projected to be only one per cent this year.

Moreover, inflation rates have dropped to eight per cent and the GDP growth rate is roughly 4.5 per cent. He added that the decline in the deficit, coupled with a surge in international reserves, which now stand at \$18 billion, provide Egypt with the ability to finance any substantial increase in economic activity in the future.

He also pointed out that the six to seven per cent projected economic growth rate will help draw investors to the Egyptian capital market. "The market has seen a great rebirth this year," said Boutros-Ghali.

The market, which has been performing well over the past year due to a surge in share offerings of newly-privatised companies, has al-

ready caught the eye of many investors.

"The market turnover recorded an increase of 130 per cent during the first seven months of 1996, reaching LE4.2 billion compared to LE1.8 billion for the same period in 1995," said Abdel-Hameed Ibrahim, head of the Capital Market Authority (CMA).

Ibrahim emphasised the important role the

strong position. "The Egyptian capital market is characterised by share prices that are quite low compared to their yield — a fact that gives it an advantage over other emerging stock markets," Tawfik told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

"Furthermore, the stability in exchange rates grants the foreign investor a profit that will not be affected when converted to other cur-

first for creating a database that maps the nationwide investment opportunities. The other, which includes private sector businesses, is charged with helping to resolve disputes that negatively affect investors.

Moreover, Egypt now enjoys a streamlined set of incorporation and investment laws, and a simpler

approvals process. The pace of the privatisation programme has also taken a turn for the better, with the government selling major stakes in state-owned enterprises, he said. Gabr also believes that the strong international interest in the Commercial International Bank Global Depository Receipts offered on the London Stock Exchange serves to prove the credibility of the Egyptian economy has in the international arena.

In an interview with the *Weekly*, Richard Ensor, managing director of Euromoney Publications, the conference's organiser, expressed his confidence in the Egyptian economy. "It is really happening," he said. "We chose Egypt to hold this conference now because we believe that rapid economic growth is taking place in Egypt."

The Egyptian capital market is characterised by a significant number of listed companies with high liquidity," added Ensor. "This attracts investors who search for shares that are easily traded."

Conferences such as this one, said Ensor, are an invaluable means of familiarising the rest of the world with the progress Egypt has made in recent years.

"You [Egypt] are still not good in telling foreign investors what opportunities are available in Egypt," he said. "Egypt is currently making genuine progress, and that is the message that should be sent to the whole world."

Market report

Financial sector soars

TRADING activity on the capital market was again on the upswing, with the General Market Index ending 5 September at 2334.99 points, while total market turnover reached

LE380.80 million compared to LE136.84 million the week before.

The manufacturing sector index followed a similar trend, closing at 298.01 points compared to its opening level of 297.84. Out of the shares of 27 sector companies, which were traded on the market this week, 20 increased in value.

The Middle and West Delta Mills Company led the pack, floating 4.5 million shares and capturing 48.38 per cent of the total market transactions. Its shares witnessed a 300 per cent increase in value, and closed at LE40, after LE18.05 million in its shares changed

hands. Shares of the Egyptian International for Pharmaceutical Industries gained LE7 per share to close at LE120. Shares of the General Company for Paper Manufacturing (RAKTA) closed at LE25, 7.06 per cent lower than their opening price.

The financial sector index registered a 13.66 point increase, closing at 270.11. Shares of the Misr International Bank gained LE4.55 to close at LE300.55, while those of the Watany Bank of Egypt gained LE1.85 per share to close at LE27.5. Dropping by LE15, shares of the National Society Generale Bank closed at LE430, while those of the Commercial International

Bank (CIB) lost LE8 to level off at LE472.

In all, the shares of 27 companies increased in value, 14 decreased and 36 remained unchanged.

The seminar, which was attended by members of other consumer protection societies in Cairo and representatives of the consumer protection committee at the MST, stressed the importance of governmental control of the market and establishing regulations against monopolies and commercial fraud.

Participants in the seminar recommended that non-governmental consumer protection societies should keep consumers informed of their rights and responsibilities. They also stressed the importance of adhering to health standards in the food industry.

SHU share offering

WITHIN the framework of the privatisation programme, the National Company for Construction and Urbanisation (NCCU) is inviting bids for 74 per cent of its holdings in El-Shams for Housing and Urbanisation (SHU), a holding company, is searching for an anchor investor or investors to purchase either all or part of the 6.2 million shares up for sale. The minimum order is for 1.4 million shares.

The holding company currently owns 60 per cent of SHU, while the remaining 40 per cent is held by individual investors. SHU's capital structure will be changed after the sale so that its Employee Shareholders' Association (ESA) will acquire five per cent of the capital. NCCU's post-sale stake in SHU will be 10 per cent.

SHU has a paid-in capital of LE140 million and it posted a net profit of LE13.4 million for fiscal year 1995-96 compared to LE8.1 million the previous year.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Lisez

Kurdes

Enquête sur une guerre sans fin

Interventions américaines et turques

Le mépris du droit

Investissements en Egypte

Optimisme des institutions financières internationales

Bosnie

Elections sur fond de partition

Rentrée scolaire

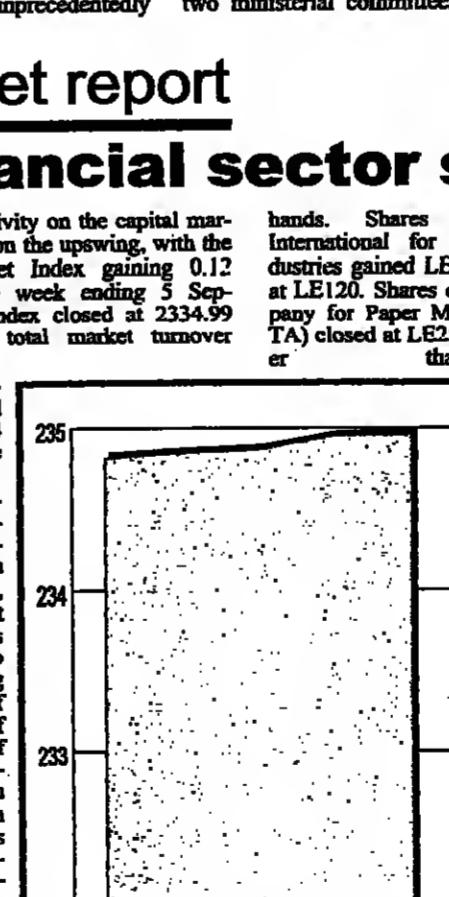
Le grignotage de la gratuité

Coupe arabe

La Palestine, terre promise de football

Rédacteur en Chef Exécutif Mohamed Salmawy

Président et Rédacteur en Chef Ibrahim Nafie



مكتبة من الأصل

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

1 4 6

On 22 January 1901, the empress of the seas set sail on her final voyage to the hereafter. It was a departure well befitting of the reign of Victoria, Queen of Great Britain and Ireland and Empress of India.

Queen Victoria had the longest reign of any of Great Britain's monarchs in modern history. Her 64-year rule, from 1837 to her death in 1901, was longer than the combined rule of the four kings who succeeded her (51 years).

It was Victoria who built the second British Empire, extending over the five continents outside Europe, three centuries after Elizabeth I built the first. Control over the "Empire on which the sun never sets" depended primarily on the might of the British navy.

It was fitting, therefore, that the funereal ceremonies for Victoria should take place at sea. Nor was it odd that *Al-Ahram* should depict the event as the "departure of the empress of the seas".

Queen Victoria passed away at 82. *Al-Ahram* reports, "after a long and full life of far-reaching fame and dominion".

What strikes us immediately in the full page biography of Queen Victoria that appeared in *Al-Ahram* of 23 January 1901, is the amount of German blood running in her veins. Victoria was the daughter of the Princess of Saxe Coburg, the wife of a prince from this same German dynasty.

Secondly, we are struck by the fact that Victoria was a prolific beater of children. Her first daughter was born in 1840 within her first year of marriage and over the next 17

years she gave birth to 8 more children, four sons and four daughters. Nor did she give up child-bearing until four years before the death of her husband. The size of the immediate royal family would quickly augment so that, at the time of her death, her direct descendants numbered 72 children and grandchildren.

As this might suggest, Victoria enjoyed a considerably stable domestic life. After her husband died in 1861, "she secluded herself from society for five years, refusing to host a party or a large reception," as *Al-Ahram* writes. "In 1863 she published *Contemplation on Life and the Hereafter*" dedicated to Prince Albert, and in 1869 she published *Our Life in the Scottish Highlands*".

In its attempt to provide its readers with a glimpse of Queen Victoria's domestic life, *Al-Ahram* selected and translated the portrait that appeared in the French newspaper *Voice de Paris*.

Victoria was notoriously parsimonious. *Al-Ahram* wrote, "Her personal fortune after 60 years at the helm of the nation must be enormous. She was particularly frugal, and abhorred ostentation. It is said that when she needed to buy a pair of gloves, she would never spend more than 12 shillings."

She was also well known for her love of dogs. *Al-Ahram*'s account here is not without a tinge of sarcasm. "She spent more on her dogs than she did on her subjects. In the gardens of Windsor Palace, she had 50 dogs from every species. Each had a house that

Britain had been occupying Egypt for nearly 19 years when Queen Victoria died at the age of 82. Dr. Yunan Labib Rizq writes that *Al-Ahram* described Victoria's death as "the departure of the empress of the seas". In a profile published by the newspaper, Victoria came across as a doting wife, a prolific mother, a frugal eater and a parsimonious spender on everything except dogs. As a tribute to Victoria, the British community in Alexandria established a new school and called it Victoria College. The prestigious school, where Jordan's King Hussein was educated, was renamed El-Nasr (Victory) College after the 1952 Revolution.

would be a dream home for any number of British's poor and they were fed at regular intervals with an array of delicacies that the hundreds of thousands of indigent roaming England's streets could not dream of in a lifetime. Such was a dog's fortune during its lifetime. When it died, the queen would have a tomb erected for it with its picture engraved on a plaque."

It was under Victoria that Britain occupied Egypt, which was still under British occupation when she died nearly 20 years later. Any suggestion that this occupation would only be temporary had long since vanished.

British officials, "children of the Thames", as *Al-Ahram* called them, held most of the top-level posts in the Egyptian administra-

tion. Not only did they control the keys to power, but Her Majesty's subjects had a strong foothold in virtually every field of economic, commercial, political and social interests. It is against this background that one must view the Egyptian reaction to Victoria's death.

At the official level, it was decided to send a high-level delegation to attend the queen's funeral. The delegation, "decreed by His Royal Highness the Khedive and approved by the Council of Ministers of the Egyptian government" was formed within two days of the arrival of the news.

Evidently, *Al-Ahram* sent a correspondent to attend the funeral and the coronation of the new king. Until this point, *Al-Ahram* had to

rely on reports from Reuters and other British and French news agencies. From 1 February, however, its reports would have the by-line "from our correspondent in the British capital".

The Egyptian delegation remained in England until the end of February, which is when Edward's coronation took place.

Meanwhile, Cairo undertook preparations for a display of official mourning. All government offices were to close on 2 February, the day of Her Majesty's funeral and for the same reason, the Shura Legislative Council session, scheduled for that day, was postponed to the following day. The Khedivial Stock Exchange would also close for the day.

Evidently, some of the British officials in the Egyptian government attempted to impose mourning upon the employees within their departments. Sometimes they took this a bit too far, as the following *Al-Ahram* story about the railways authority, which was under the direct control of the British administration, suggests. *Al-Ahram* relates, "When news reached Egypt of the death of the Queen of England, a department chief in the railway authority informed his staff that, although wearing tokens of mourning was not necessarily a duty, it was the right time to do. One of the employees had been absent when the official made this announcement. The following morning, all the employees reported to work wearing black arm bands and sombre clothes, with the exception of the individual who had not been present to hear his heart?"

Commencement of Victoria's death gave rise to an institution that has lasted. The initiative began in Alexandria, where, shortly after the funeral ceremonies, the British community held several meetings with the British Consul in order to consider a project that would commemorate the memory of Queen Victoria in Egypt. At first a hospital was proposed. However, eventually they decided upon a school, which would be opened along the lines of the British educational system. Victoria College marked the first British venture since the occupation of Egypt into a field pioneered by the French, Americans and Italians — institutionalised private education. The college was a symbol of the cultural presence of the "children of the Thames" in Egypt.

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.



Berlin conference to meet in preparation for the forthcoming MENA Summit

THE GERMAN-Arab Chamber of Commerce in Cairo will organise a conference in Berlin on 16 September 1996. Nearly 200 German companies who will participate in the Cairo Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Economic Summit in November will attend the Berlin Conference.

The German minister of economy and representatives from the Eu-

ropean Union will attend the Berlin conference, along with Egyptian representatives of the Chambers of Commerce Federation, the Federation of Industries and the Egyptian Businessmen's Organisation.

In an attempt to elucidate investment conditions and opportunities in Egypt, *Al-Ahram Weekly* will issue special pages on the Berlin Conference.

These special pages will be issued and distributed among the German companies during the conference so that they will have a good idea about the activities of the distinguished members of the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce.

In an attempt to elucidate investment conditions and opportunities in Egypt, *Al-Ahram Weekly* will issue special pages on the Berlin Conference.

Dr Osama El-Baz (left) and Dr Peter Göpfert, executive director of the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce, Cairo



Programme of the preparatory meeting

16 September 1996

11.45: Meeting at the foyer of the Radisson SAS Hotel Berlin.

12.00: Lunch on board a riverboat, hosted by "Berlin Partners".

14.00: Return to Radisson SAS Hotel.

14.15: Welcome by Dr Michael Pohl, chairman of the North African Initiative of German Business.

The significance of the North African Middle East area for the German external economic policy:

14.30: Dr Christian Ueberschaer, director-general, head of the Federal Foreign Office, Bonn.

14.45: Dr Klaus-Peter von Horn, Director for bilateral economic relations, Germany and the Arab countries, Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs, Bonn.

The Middle East/ North Africa Economic Summit, Cairo, as central forum for political and economical decision-makers:

15.00: H.E. Ambassador Shoukry Fouad, general coordinator of the Government of Egypt for the Middle East/ North African Economic Summit.

15.15: Mr. Pedro Ralda, director, World Economic Forum, Geneva. Framework for company cooperation and direct investment in Egypt.

15.30: H.E. Dr Ibrahim Fawzi, president of the General Authority for Investment of the Government of Egypt.

16.00: Mr. Mohamed Farid Khamis, chairman of the Egyptian Federation of Industry.

17.30: End of the Conference Bus transfer to the airport available.

Additional programme of the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce:

18.30: Hotel Radisson, Berlin. Round-table discussion, followed by dinner, organised by the German-Arab Chamber of Commerce. Topics: Potentials of Egyptian-German industrial cooperation. How to increase German/Egyptian investment in Egypt. Participants: Egyptian and German businessmen and government representatives.

17 September 1996

08.30: Working breakfast in the premises of Adtranz-Factory in Berlin. Adtranz (a joint venture between Daimler-Benz and ABB) is Germany's largest company in the field of transport sector in the emerging Middle East market.

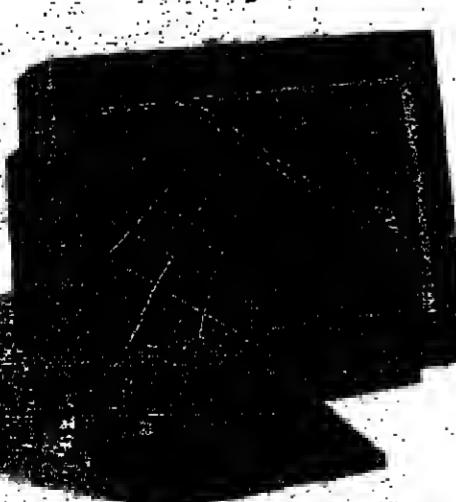
11.00: Optional: Visit of the factory.

12.00: End of the programme. Leading officials to attend conference.

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Close up

Salama A. Salama

Britain flounders

In the wake of the Suez crisis British influence in the Middle East waned to the extent that it is now a mere shadow of American policy. Various British governments have attempted to capitalise on their country's long involvement in the Arab scene and its lengthy experience in dealing in the region. Yet recently even these long established ties have been undermined by the rabid pursuit of what are perceived in the Arab world as short term political and economic benefits.

In contrast to France, Britain has consistently sided with the US in any Middle East crisis. France has always maintained a balance between its own interests and its wish to maintain the good will of Arab states. This balanced French position has been a great help in offsetting the most excessive aspects of American foreign policy and in creating an atmosphere conducive to dialogue, an essential prerequisite in lessening tensions and resentment.

In the last few days, though, Britain's regressive policies have plummeted to new depths. In the aftermath of the American missile attack on Iraq, launched under the pretext that Iraqi troops had advanced to the town of Arbil in order to assist one Kurdish faction against another, American actions were roundly condemned by Arabs as lacking any international or legal justification. Not only did the US action deprive Iraq of the right to defend its territory, it also gave a green light to Turkey and Iran to violate Iraqi sovereignty. Yet despite the almost unanimous international opposition to American actions, not least Washington's attempt to engineer a Security Council resolution condemning Iraq and therefore giving some legitimacy to American actions, Britain hastened to back Washington to the hilt.

Britain's pro-American bias in the Security Council was exposed when France, Russia and China joined forces to defeat Anglo-American manoeuvres.

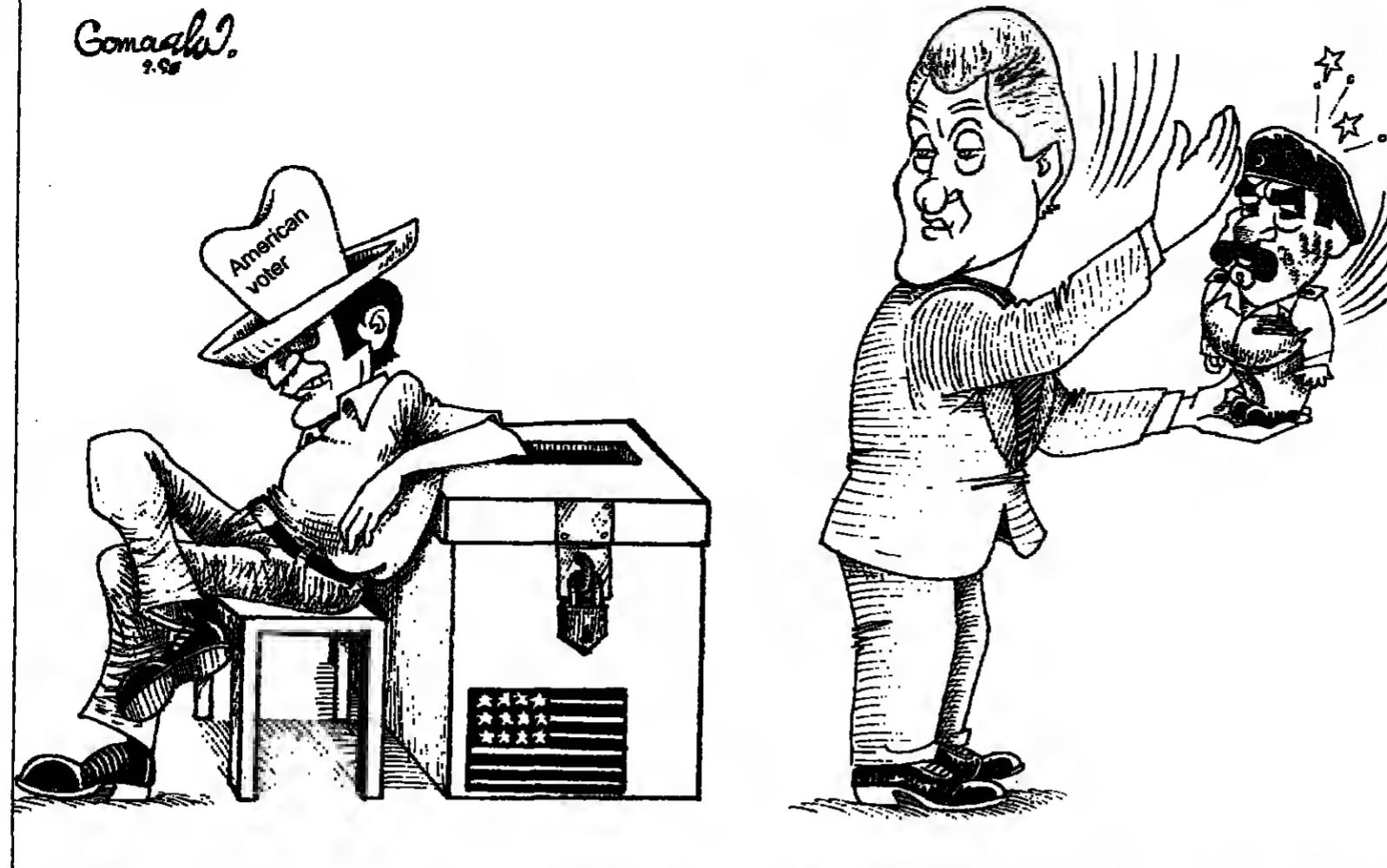
In a second incident, the British government was seen to vacillate wildly in the face of the crisis that followed its granting permission for the holding of a conference, which included delegations from known terrorist organisations, in London.

There may well have been strong legal justification as far as the British government was concerned for allowing the conference to go ahead, but the fact remains that the majority of Arab parties remain bewildered by British policy. The government initially defended its position to allow the convening of the conference unconvincingly, and then found equally implausible pretexts to cancel the event. It is rumoured that the cancellation of the conference came about largely because of the pressure of Jewish organisations.

British policy in the Middle East is quite clearly floundering. As regards vacillation over the recent conference, the British government's ambiguous stand leaves it open to charges that it is willing to act as best to terrorist organisations as a means of gaining political leverage over Arab states. In this instance, and in its unquestioning support of Washington, Britain is emerging as no more than the wagging tail of American policy.

Unless Britain can redress the imbalances in its current stand in the Middle East — imbalances that are sounding alarm signals in a majority of Arab capitals — then the UK is in danger of losing its credibility and standing throughout the region.

Gomasho



Soapbox

Sovereign rights

The US administration deliberately sought to deceive international public opinion prior to, during and in the aftermath of its aggression against Iraq.

The US claims that recent Iraqi moves violate Security Council resolutions while its own actions are in accordance with such resolutions and within the bounds of international law. In fact no Security Council resolution adopted since 1991 places any constraints on Iraq exercising its sovereign rights in full, rights which include the deployment of troops within its borders.

Since 1991, largely due to the US presence and subsequent US, British and French interventions, there has been virtually no civil administration in northern Iraq. My government has sold its Kurdish citizens that it is committed to peaceful and democratic dialogue the aim of which would be to maintain national unity while cementing Kurdish self rule, originally granted in 1974. That goal had almost been reached when the US administration prevented the Kurdish leaders from signing any agreement.

Since 1994 Kurdish factions have been engaged in internecine conflicts that have cost the lives of our citizens, the looting of property and the destruction of the infrastructure. Turkish and Iranian military interventions to support one faction against another became a commonplace.

International parties, and particularly the US, have consistently acquiesced to these interventions and have exercised no pressure whatsoever to bring such actions to a halt. Last month the fighting escalated due to sustained Iranian intervention, an incursion that drove the major Kurdish parties, as well as the Kurdish population in the region, specifically in the region of Arbil, to solicit assistance and support, fearing for their own safety. In observance of its mandate, and by exercising its sovereign rights, my government extended its support to Mr Barzani in order to put an end to the blood bath and to deter future Iranian incursions intended to pit one party against the other. Mission accomplished, the troops returned to their previous positions.

This week's Soapbox speaker is the Iraqi representative to the Arab League.



Nabil Negm

Re-examining old postulates

While Arab governments establish diplomatic and economic relations with Israel, on the popular level, boycott remains the prevalent strategy. Ossama El-Ghazali Harb calls for a re-examination

In his article in *Al-Ahram Weekly* (29 August-4 September), "A Gathering in Ramallah", Mohamed Sid-Ahmed raised a number of crucial issues concerning what he called "the peace strategy and mechanisms" of Arab popular forces vis-à-vis Israel. The core of Mr Sid-Ahmed's idea is that, while "states" and "ruling forces" in all or the majority of Arab countries have signed peace agreements with Israel and are consequently committed to the process of normalisation and interaction with Israel, Arab popular forces (the rank and file, as it were) or a sweeping majority thereof, are still boycotting Israel. This idea is based on the thesis that the on-going peace process is merely a "truce", stemming from a transient disequilibrium in the balance of power between contending forces. Consequently, these forces should not totally relinquish the idea of fully eliminating the "Zionist" challenge in the future, when circumstances are more propitious.

Sid-Ahmed has candidly broached vital issues which have been overlooked by the majority of Arab intellectuals and thinkers during the past two decades. Having made a great leap toward peace, Arabs find themselves standing in the middle of the road, asking themselves: Do we really want to reach the end? Do we, as Arabs, seek a permanent and comprehensive peace with the "state" of Israel — peace which, ultimately, would entail the recognition of its existence and the establishment of normal relations? On the other hand, Israelis are asking themselves now: Do we really want a real, permanent and comprehensive peace with Arabs, including an independent Palestinian state on our doorstep, and are we willing to give all occupied territories back to the Arabs?

To build upon the foundation that Mr Sid-Ahmed has laid, and to stimulate a fruitful debate, we should first differentiate — in both the Arab and Israeli arenas — between those who reject the idea of "peace" to begin with, and those who accept it. This differentiation was not clearly made by Sid-Ahmed. Evidently, those who

reject the possibility of peace between Arabs and Israelis would refuse normalisation with Israel. On the Arab side, rejection would imply a boycott, regardless of agreements signed by the Arab governments with Israel; on the Israeli side, rejection would target the Palestinian state and would imply the continued occupation of Arab territories, supremacy in traditional armed forces, and a monopoly on nuclear power — even if agreements between Israel and Arab states are temporarily, although grudgingly accepted.

Sid-Ahmed's urging to re-evaluate peace strategies and mechanisms leads us to three specific issues.

First among these is the way we may manipulate the "boycott" of Israel. In other words: can we use it as a threat to be withdrawn only if Israel concedes to all the requirements of comprehensive peace? or can we use the idea of boycott in a more "flexible" way? In this case, we could ease the boycott gradually with every positive step towards peace, which would be a means of encouraging Israel to achieve progress.

It is only to be expected that various groups in Egypt and the Arab world have advocated a continuation of the boycott and rejected normalisation with Israel. These calls did not amount to a total rejection of the concept of peace; they resulted from a perception of normalisation and the lifting of the boycott as "rewards" that could not be offered for free. According to this perception, Israel should fulfil all commitments to peace, and acknowledge the Palestinians' legitimate rights, before easing the boycott was discussed.

Undoubtedly, this attitude, adopted by a number of parties, trade unions and popular groups, has effectively demonstrated the extent of Arab popular rejection of Israel's obstinacy. As Sid-Ahmed suggests, however, we should review this attitude and analyse its positive and negative aspects, according to past experience.

Exaggerated rejection does not reveal the existence of a wave of popular opposition to Israeli intransigence, as much as it implies the existence of a sharp

discord between governments and peoples with respect to the peace process. Rejection leads to stagnation, and even to the despotic suppression of any intellectual or thinker's right to express an attitude, based on his own beliefs, which runs counter to this current of thought. Some individuals who have travelled to other countries officially and legally have been accused of virtually betraying the nation. Therefore, many visitors to Israel must conceal those visits, to depart and return in secrecy — an uncomfortable and deceptive situation.

Israelis know us far better than we know them. This is the logical result of the massive influx of Israelis into Egypt, and their thirst to research, understand and investigate everything concerning us. We have refrained from doing likewise, as if ignorance will protect our identity, rights and national culture.

Secondly, should we persist in thinking of Israel as a single mass, or should we perceive it as it actually is — namely, a complex conglomerate of cultural, political and social contradictions? Many people have repeatedly stressed that Israel is an artificial entity composed of dissenting elements from all cultures and nationalities. When they began to think of interaction with Israel, however, they consider it as the most homogeneous and tightly-knit country of the world, marked by no differences between left and right. No idea is more naive and pernicious.

Our negative attitude to Arabs in Israel suffices to demonstrate this blinkered perception: those Palestinians who clung tightly to their land, and insisted on living in their country, represent 15 per cent of Israel's population.

The third issue is the most sensitive and requires courage in handling. It concerns a point Mr Sid-Ahmed mentioned at the end of his article, namely: Are we ready to admit the legitimacy of the Jews' anxiety, based on their bitter history? We may also add: are we therefore predisposed to understand and ap-

preciate their historical psychological connection with Palestine? If Sid-Ahmed is saying that the Arabs' acknowledgement of legitimate Jewish fears is the best way of compelling them to recognise the Arabs' rights to a similar anxiety, understanding Jewish religious feelings towards Palestine is also the best way of compelling them to differentiate between such sentiments and the use of these sentiments as an alibi for depriving Palestinians of their rights and ignoring their natural feelings toward their land, history and religion.

We should admit that the Palestinian question, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the long years of animosity and bitterness have created taboos. Jewish migration and settlement, the cancerous Jewish expansion into the heart of Arab territories, and the unrealistic and immoral denial of Palestinians' rights to their and their ancestors' homeland, have naturally led to Arab disengagement of Jewish religious-based or sentimental claims to links to Palestine, and of Jewish claims regarding a history of suffering and discrimination.

The atmosphere of peace, however, and the possibility that Israelis and Jews may begin to acknowledge the legitimate rights of Arabs in Palestine, after a struggle which culminated in the Intifada, should be paralleled with a more balanced perception of reality. This perception should combine an understanding of specifically Jewish feelings and anxieties, on one hand, and a clear denial that these may be used as a pretext to harm the Palestinians.

To sum up, Sid-Ahmed's arguments should not be discarded as a cry in the wilderness. They should encourage the Egyptian and Arab intelligentsia to engage in a lively debate, one in which we jettison the illusion that refusal, boycott and rejection are the only means by which we can uphold the national interest and remain true to the Palestinian cause.

The writer is editor-in-chief of *Al-Siyasa Al-Dawlia* (International Politics) journal, issued by *Al-Ahram*.

Towards a real Pan-Arab project

Is Arab unity still a viable project, or just an outdated pipe dream? Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed faces some new realities

The end of the Cold War was associated with, if not precipitated by, the demise of the Eastern European version of the socialist model as a credible model of sustainable development. It may be noted that this model was not an unmitigated disaster, despite allegations, fashionable in the '90s, to the contrary.

One should also question the common interpretation of the events which took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s in Eastern Europe, and which many analysts claimed were demonstrations of the popular rejection of socialism *per se*, rather than the rejection of a particular model. Any objective assessment of the performance of the socialist model must admit that it failed to maintain its credibility as a successful model of sustainable development in its last years; but this is not to deny the achievements of the early years, particularly the 1950s and the 1960s.

The lessons of that failure should be assimilated; the difficulty of pursuing this model at present, with its emphasis on central planning and state ownership of the means of production, should also be understood. The increasingly assertive role of the private sector in many Arab countries and the globalised nature of the world economy, characterised by the preponderant role of transnational enterprises, necessitate innovations in the management of the national economy, if Arab nationalists still maintain their belief in a socialist model of development. In fact, the social market economy could enable Arab countries to avoid many of the symptoms of social and political dislocation which have marked their transitions to full-fledged capitalism in recent years.

If Arab nationalist intellectuals accept these changing realities of the international system, it will still be painful for them to acknowledge two other realities of a regional nature, namely the existence of Israel and the resilience of the Arab state system. They should have the courage to admit that no Arab nationalist regime or party had a clear idea of how to confront the Zionist project. The dream of all Arab nationalists, however, was the eradication of the state of Israel and its physical demise as one separate entity in the Middle East.

This rejection of Zionism was not motivated by any racial hatred of the Jews, but rather by the firm belief that Zionism is one of the remnants of the colonial, racist mentality which was a driving force behind late 19th-century European colonialism. Even in the heyday of Arab nationalism, however, not a single Arab nationalist regime was seriously preparing its people, economy and army for a confrontation with Israel. The military mobilisation of the late spring of 1967 was largely a response to reports about Israeli troop concentrations along Syrian borders.

Since then, Israel has grown into a sort of military, economic and political superpower of the Middle East. Any talk at present about the liquidation of the existence of the state of Israel is either an exercise of fantasy or simply politically irresponsible. For all practical purposes,

Zionism is here to stay in the heart of the Arab world for several decades to come, thanks primarily to the ingenuity and the dynamism of the Israelis and secondarily to the economic, military and diplomatic support they get from successive US administrations, who see no difficulty whatsoever in pursuing policies of unconditional support to Israel and simultaneously promoting their interests in the Arab world.

Israel still remains a basic threat to the national security of Arab states and a staunch enemy of Arab progress. The basic question which must be answered is: how can the Arab regimes accommodate themselves to the presence of Israel in their midst while making their peoples aware of the challenge it represents to their unity and the peace process?

The second regional reality Arab nationalists find hard to swallow is the resilience of the territorial state system in the Arab world. The so-called "kawanz qurwa" (national entities) were perceived by the Arab nationalists as the temporary creatures of colonial powers, which would not withstand the test of time nor the burning wish of Arab masses to eliminate borders and bring together all the disparate entities into one Arab nation stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf.

This call for Arab unity was translated into concrete mergers of Arab states, most of which did not survive more than a few years, or even a few months, as was the case of the United Arab Republic which brought Egypt and Syria between 1958 and 1961, or the Union of Arab Republics which brought Sudan and Libya briefly together from 1969 to 1970. The most recent example was the unity of the two Yemens, maintained by the force of arms and at the cost of a bloody civil war.

What causes bewilderment and disarray among Arab nationalists is not only the failure of these schemes for Arab unification, together with other less ambitious schemes for coordination at a semi-regional level (the Maghribi Union or the short-lived Council of Arab Cooperation), or functional schemes (the Arab Common Market or the Council of Arab Economic Unity), but the difficulty of maintaining the territorial state itself against increasingly vocal demands for local autonomy or even secession by national minorities. This point is made abundantly clear by the Kurds in Iraq and the southern Sudanese. Is the call for Arab unity still a realistic goal, or should it be abandoned completely in favour of more limited schemes? This is definitely another harsh question that must be faced by critically-minded Arab nationalists at the end of the century.

If Arab nationalists are determined — as indeed they seem — to transform Arabism into something more than just a cultural project, they will have to undertake a serious assessment of their past experience with its successes and failures, and redefine their project taking into account the domestic, regional and international realities of the late 20th century. One of the strengths of this project in the past has been its emotional appeal to the Arab masses. It would be a major failure if it merely continues to feed on sentiments of solidarity and affinity among the Arabs. They must integrate the language of science and technology as well as concrete common economic interests. Without thus transforming the nature of their project, it is bound to become only a distant memory.

In fact, there are grounds for continuing to argue that Arabism is more than a cultural project. There are concrete economic and political interests among Arab countries to endow that project with a specific, realistic content, which takes into account both the individual interests of each Arab state, and the realities of the late 20th century. One need not enumerate the many elements of economic complementarity among Arab economies, nor dwell on the fact that economic groupings are the best way for small individual Arab economies to strike the best bargain possible in the international economy.

Apart from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, the rest of the globe has already become part of a common scheme for economic integration, or is firmly engaged on this path. Common Arab demands for non-discriminatory treatment in petrochemical trade, better terms with transnational corporations, or even more decent conditions for Arab workers in Europe, could be better satisfied if they were backed by the collective bargaining power of all the Arab countries. A word of caution is necessary, however. The success of any scheme for regional economic integration depends on the gradual pace of its implementation, and on its recognition of the legitimacy of each member state's interests. It has also become abundantly clear that a common Arab stand could provide considerable leverage, provided of course that they are willing and able to back up their words by action.

This new version of Arabism could therefore take the form of coordination of foreign and economic policies among Arab countries at several levels, the least ambitious of which is not necessarily the most feasible: the creation of joint ventures, freedom of movement of certain factors of production and trade, and higher forms of economic integration could be some of the steps along this path. Politically, the strengthening of the Arab League and coordination of policies in different areas are the most realistic ways of consolidating Arab solidarity.

For this project to appeal to the Arab masses, it should also be consistent with their aspirations for decent conditions of life. Arab nationalists should abandon all their illusions about the miracles that would be realised through the leadership of an inspired *za'im* (leader), who would expect from the masses only complete obedience and unconditional support for whatever cause he chooses, claiming that it will lead to Arab unity and glory. In this age of the global village, a political project which does not ensure the full participation of citizens in the management of their own affairs and full respect for their civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, will not galvanise their enthusiasm, and is not likely to survive for long. As for the nature of the economic system that

could complement this project, it is not necessary to give it a specific label. Suffice it to say that it ensures full use of the nation's and each country's economic resources, taking advantage of both market mechanisms and effective methods of planning, while satisfying the basic needs of the majority of citizens.

While the military confrontation with Israel is not to be excluded in the long or even medium term, this new version of Arabism should envisage a different type of confrontation with the Zionist project. Is it really impossible to think of defeating Zionism on its own terms, in other words through success in scientific and technological competition? Could the Arabs not devote a tiny portion of their resources to mastering modern science and applying new discoveries to all spheres of life, including agriculture, industry and services, as well as defense and government? The technological edge which Israel now enjoys would diminish, and the Middle East would witness a new balance of forces to replace the hegemony of a post-modern Israel over the divided and warring Arab tribes.

These new realities in the Arab world are bound to be taken into account by powers outside the region. Even when the Arab governments adopt a common position on a specific issue without declaring the practical steps they envisage, the major powers do not exclude the possibility that practical steps may well be taken later on. If these common stands are taken frequently with no practical steps to back them, however, they are likely to lose all credibility. Besides, the present fluid international configuration of power requires that Arab countries adopt a flexible approach towards their foreign policy alignments. There are still important differences among major powers dictated by trade rivalries and divergent national interests. Both Russia and China are still major powers to reckon with. Japan and most countries of the European Union do not share US views on many questions of international politics, particularly those related to the Middle East. Political realism would call for a discriminating approach dealing with all these powers. It is important also to work closely with domestic groups in those countries which take a sympathetic stand on Arab issues — with a particular focus, of course, on those groups which have concrete interests in the Arab world — or at least maintain contact with them, encouraging their awareness of Arab points of view on questions of mutual concern to both parties.

Undoubtedly, these are only the broad lines of what Arab nationalists should consider while they prepare to face the challenges of the 21st century. Without this new thinking, Arabism runs the risk of remaining only a cultural project, which lacks any of the dynamic elements that could allow it to adapt to new realities in Arab societies, their region and the world.

The writer is professor of political science at Cairo University.

A night of lonely hunting

Music from the movies: Cairo Symphony Orchestra; conductor, Philip Nuzzo; soprano, Therese Panicali; Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 7 Sept; Piano recital; James Avery, Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 6 Sept

The art empire of culture heaves itself once more into festival time and everyone who is anyone has to be everywhere at once. Culture has changed its public face, a nick here, a switch there. Most of it, though, has little to do with art. Tourism, yes, and big biz, but not art.

Of course, biz is nice, but it is not the whole story. Art and biz can flow together, but mostly only at the exalted pinnacles of diffusion. Cairo is not one of these places, though it is making an effort to join the stampede, capitalising on its ancient roots and on contemporary practice.

That there appears to be so little space for music is sad. Late Beethoven or the 20th century just do not find a welcome. But the other arts do reasonably well in the scramble, so there has to be some hope for music.

The Cairo Symphony Orchestra, with conductor Philip Nuzzo, made a brilliant splash at the beginning of the new season with a concert of film music. Cinema music, of course, started when sound hit the silver screen. Before that the silents had just a piano for accompaniment and a Wurlitzer for the overture. But sound brought colour and colour brought music to the wide screen, as Nuzzo explained in his opening talk.

Music assumed ever greater importance, until now, in 1996, few are the films that would enter production without a fully formed score. Nor is that score anymore to do with the slushier moments, articulating the sentiments of *Love Story* or *Chariots of Fire*. Such films belong firmly in the past. It is with apocalypse and global collapse that music has thrived.

The concert began with the music William Walton wrote for Olivier's *Henry V*. It takes some compost to compete with Olivier in full voice, as he was in this film. Walton's score diplomatically arranged to fit things neatly around the situation.

After this came Therese Panicali to sing the big movie songs. She did the usual things — *Cabaret*, *Oz*, Irving Berlin's ragtime numbers, and best of the set, Hippfield's song from *Casablanca*, As Time Goes By. Panicali was very visual — maybe a bit bewitched. She looks like one of the sophisticated, crazy ladies Boldini painted. Long-winding honeysuckle arms made for elbow length, white kid gloves, which she wore as if to the manner born. And



Therese Panicali

the voice? It stands up to the appearance. High soprano, space cleaver on top and down below a bit of trouble. The low voice will not obey her best wishes. She knows all about singers who aspire to the best performances, hanging whatever notes they have onto the words. She knows. She is definitely a knowledgeable lady but the voice, as yet, will not obey. So Sondheim, whose songs figure much in her act, is mostly lost, because his melodies, being weak, desperately need the words, desperately need a disease, as yet she is not.

She fires off into Garland and Streisand country and New York, New York was the best song of the evening. She need not, however, follow the big be-

ters all the way. She has far too unique a voice for that.

After Panicali's scorch on the rocks we had Korngold's *Robin Hood*. For such a good composer this really is a disgrace, a long, oversweet draught of corny mush. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra rushed in to save the scene. It had played, from the very beginning, with tact and vitality. It covered all areas. (Never mind about Brahms, just wait until you have heard this orchestra play the stampede scene from *Lawrence of Arabia*.)

But the question arises. At about half way through this concert it becomes inconsistent. Just how much film music can you take without throwing up.

moment his hands first touched the keys.

He seemed unable to find the depths of sound for the Busoni. The stresses and the minutely correct fingering were all there, but the sound edifice remained absent. The Schumann was a miracle, not golden Oscar playing but fresh, simple musical pictures of states outside speech or sound, softly floated meditations. The Janácek was the climax of this recital, while Debussy's so-called impressionism was a salutary lesson in how visiting pianists might get off the old classical treadmill and give something, unexpectedly different. Avery was simple, and played with heart and courage. The results were blessings and boons during a noisy, festive time.

Cinema

Let's play happy families



Whose heart belongs to daddy? And does daddy have a heart? Not in *Mit Foll*, Ra'fat El-Meehy's latest film, finds Mohamed El-Assouly

unable to find a richer father, asks the same man to adopt him. The millionaire accepts and calls him Mit Foll. And so husband and wife become brother and sister.

Hussein Effendi, the foster-father, does, however, already have a son, the congenital loser Khibtak, whom he makes into his driver and generally treats as a servant.

The plot provides the hanger on which El-Meehy drapes an analysis of the ludicrous nature of many family relationships. And at the heart of the film lies an extremely bleak view of the nuclear family, a view that reduces all father figures to dictators, and all families to their fiefdoms.

El-Meehy himself is quite clear in his beliefs. "I feel that the unquestioned patriarchal basis of our society is the reason for its backwardness," he says. "The head of the family, of the clan, of the tribe... all of these father figures are responsible for our decline. Nobody should have custody of any one else."

In the movie theatres that

play his films, El-Meehy is often to be found sitting among the audience. "Sometimes I discover what I intended by a certain sequence in the film is interpreted in an absolutely different manner by the audience. Sometimes I hear people swearing at the director, not knowing I am sitting right behind them."

Mit Foll ends with the husband and wife — brother and sister — being sent to kindergarten while the father negotiates the adoption of the head of the police department, no doubt as a means of extending his own authority. So much for happy families.

The making of a film like *Mit Foll* is really something of an event. Its director, Ra'fat El-Meehy, is in many ways a pioneer, not least in the manner in which he finances his productions. *Mit Foll* was basically paid for by loans from those most conservative financial institutions, joint stock banks. Yet despite the source of his funding, El-Meehy appears to have enjoyed a considerable amount of leeway when it comes to the content of his film. A highly skilful filmmaker, El-Meehy refused to play safe. The result is that *Mit Foll*, despite its success, is a far from obviously commercial film.

El-Meehy began his career in cinema by writing scripts in the early seventies for veteran director Kamal El-Sheikh and for Saad Arafa. These early scripts were generally characterised by their choice of controversial subjects. By the end of the decade El-Meehy had graduated to directing his own films. His first two ventures into feature direction were at once pessimistic and melodramatic. He soon, though, found his stride and a very particular directorial voice emerged. Witty, cynical, with wry political connotations interwoven with moments of startling black comedy — this is what the cinema audience came to expect from Ra'fat El-Meehy.

El-Afouka, made in 1983, in many ways exemplifies El-Meehy's early approach. The main character, the lawyer of the title, inhabits a world without moral absolutes. He is the ultimate pragmatist, maintaining relations with an imprisoned ex-leader of the sixties police state, and with a seventies drug baron, a product

of the get-rich-quick open-door seventies. Between these two extremes he successfully plays his trade, playing games with his clients and almost invariably coming out on top.

During the mid-eighties El-Meehy's career encountered a hitch. Law suits were filed against both *El-Afouka* — by the Lawyer's Syndicate — and against *El-Hobb Gissa Akhira*. The latter suit charged the director with promoting prostitution in his films.

By 1986 El-Meehy had bounced back with another satirical black comedy, *El-Sada El-Regal*, which followed the changing fortunes of a family that somehow managed to contain two transsexuals.

Complicated love triangles, further complicated by sex-changes and the inevitable dilemmas in

parenting that follow, were all rolled together in what might, at first, be read as a critique of gender based roles.

The following year came *Sa-mak Laban Tamr Hudy*, which El-Meehy describes as a "Tom and Jerry kind of satire". Initially it was to be a big budget production, but was reduced to a film about a simple citizen who, hoping only to get married and lead an ordinary kind of life, finds himself relentlessly pursued by the representatives of a mysterious authority.

In 1989 *Sayedati Anesat* was released, another reworking of the infinite permutations of family life. In this instance four women decide to marry the same man, a strategy that allows them to continue with their successful careers and provides someone, the house-

husband, to look after household chores. Once again, in this seemingly simple plot, El-Meehy adds an ambiguous twist when the house-husband develops a phantom pregnancy and is left wondering which of his wives is the mother.

Mit Foll is Ra'fat El-Meehy's latest film. And it is based on a very simple premise. What would happen if both children and parents had the right to choose each other?

A husband and wife discover they have been lying to each other, pretending they both belonged to rich families. As a consequence they decide to find themselves new parents. The wife asks a millionaire to be her father, and he accepts claiming he has no sons. He chooses a new name, Sun Man Raa, for his new daughter. Her husband,

The concert ended with Maurice Jarre's award winning score for *Lawrence of Arabia*. This was the real thing, genuine film music, abundant, overflowing, generous and visual. Huge forces were obviously involved. It is everyone's music. The images are all there — the MGM lion, RKO lightening, Columbia's Liberty, King Kong — they come thick and fast.

Jarre's music echoed all the marques, just as the solid architectural of Omar Sharif and Peter O'Toole took over the screen. Better leave music to the gods.

Cinema has its share of unforgettable musical consequences — just think of Ava Gardner's husky farewell to Charlton Heston in *Earthquake*, as she floats off to eternity atop a river of subterranean sewage. Think too of the music in the Cocteau-Melville film *Les Enfants Terribles*, when Nicole Stéphane breaks open the door of a locked room to discover the body of her brother sprawled across his bed, to the shattering cacophony of Bach's multi-harpsichord concerto. So much for ancient and modern.

On 6 September came a comforting balm for pure music, provided in the Main Hall. This was the first concert in Cairo by James Avery, an American pianist currently based in Germany. The heart is a lonely hunter, and on this particular evening 38 had come out to play. In the streets were police sirens, in the concert hall something new and true for the tiny audience.

Avery began with the Bach-Busoni organ transcription *Nun Komm der Heiden Heiland*, then Schumann's *Fantasi*, Janácek's *Im Nebel* and Debussy's *Estampes*.

The slightly withdrawn professorial figure fiddling with his glasses turned out to be a seen. In the endless procession of visiting pianists it would be nice to know what some of them think about the music they play. With Avery we were given all the clues, from the heart of the Copac city.

Islamic Museum

Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily exc Fri, 3pm-5pm; Fri 9am-11.30am & 1pm-3pm.

Founded in 1910, the museum features a collection of ninth-century European art, amassed by the late Mahmud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, including a bust of Khalil which will be exhibited in the gallery over the past six years, including Adel El-Sawy, Fathi Hassan, Ibrahim El-Hakim and Gamal Abdel-Nasser.

Egyptian Museum

El-Suhayla, 17 El-Ahram St. Tel 336 2376. Daily exc Mon, 10am-5pm.

Egypt's largest collection of nineteenth-century European art, amassed by the late Mahmud Khalil, including works by Courbet, Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Rodin and a host of impressionist works, including a bust of Khalil which will be exhibited in the gallery over the past six years, including Adel El-Sawy, Fathi Hassan, Ibrahim El-Hakim and Gamal Abdel-Nasser.

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Two more exhibitions

Two-thirds of the way into the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre and audience hackles have been raised and placated. The Poles provoked a near riot, a sit-in, and a great deal of gnashing of teeth. Other groups secured a less frantic response.
Nehad Selaiha hares around a course that includes the majority of Cairo's theatres, sampling both the sublime and the ridiculous

Pakistan: One performance among many in a festival that excited an unprecedented show of passion

Banging at the gates

One week into the festival and I am down to my last ounce of energy. The excruciating heat wave that descended upon Cairo like an infernal breath and hung around persistently for two days took its toll of the festival's audiences. The air-conditioning systems in our theatres could not cope with it, and the atmosphere inside them, especially in the small packed halls, was easily suffocating. With only four more days to go of the festival, only the sturdiest of theatre enthusiasts are still battling on in the hope of catching some good theatre, experimental or otherwise; those of lesser stamina have fallen back, abandoning the course. And even though this here races on, one can hardly blame the drop-outs: the quality of the shows during the first week left a lot to be desired; many were simply mediocre and some downright abysmal. In ordinary circumstances one can afford to be tolerant and take a bad or middling show in one's stride; but in the rush and crush of the festival, when securing yourself a seat or a foothold to stand becomes quite a considerable feat of ingenuity, expectations soar to unreasonable heights and the inevitable result, in most cases, frustration combined with more than a fair share of disappointment. It has become something of an established pattern to find theatre swarming with people at the beginning of a performance, only to see them melting away halfway through or sometimes even earlier. It is dreadfully unkind to the performers, of course; but then, whose fault is it? The tag 'experimental', at once equivocal and tantalising, generates a kind of feverish, ghoulish hunger for excitement — for something summingly innovative or outrageously shocking. Very few of the visiting shows can meet this challenge; it does not necessarily mean that they are bad; some tread well-beaten theatrical paths quite effectively and with great verve and competence (like Cyprus's *American Buffalo*, Syria's *The Bear*, Lebanon's *The Chairs*, Germany's absurdist Beckett-inspired *Fragment of Theatre I*, or Portugal's *Mourning Becomes Electra*, Greece's *Electra*, Romania's *Pantomima*, South Africa's *Blues Train*, Brazil's *The Arrival of Sailors*, Russia's *Scapin's Tricks* or Italy's *Pantalone in Hell*); some shows opt for subtlety and finesse, like Switzerland's *The Book of Reflections* — a one-woman show where a splintered mirror acts as the central structural metaphor, or the Amsterdam Chamber Theatre's Chekhov-based *The Man Who Wished* which evokes in its five characters (three old women in black, red and yellow, celebrating their 80th birthday, with a butler and a writer in attendance) a pietà of Chekhovian characters. The latter I found particularly intriguing; it felt like a dramatic conundrum where each line rang a distant bell and challenged you

to scour your memory in search of which Chekhovian play or scene it originally occurred in. By the end of the show I felt as if I had been watching all four of Chekhov's major plays (*Uncle Vanya*, *The Seagull*, *The Three Sisters*, and *The Cherry Orchard*) rolled into one, three sisters superimposed one onto the other. It was a truly experimental performance on the verbal level — a kaleidoscopic view of the Chekhovian universe which left the audience, literally panting. All of Chekhov's autumnal humour, which is invariably tinted with existential anguish, was there and the three ladies, at the heavily laden trestle table gave us a stunning glimpse of what Chekhov's three sisters could be like thirty or even half a century on.

But then, Chekhov has been around for years, and as Shakespeare once said, familiarity breeds contempt. The small hall of the Opera House was blissfully under-occupied. For once the cooling system, in the absence of abundant and pressing crowds, was effective. But what a shame that such a show, at once tender and savage, was so poorly attended and so bluntly dismissed. If sound and fury, signifying anything or nothing, that is what people looked for in the festival, they got it in plenty thanks to the Poles. Their *Carmina Burana* (by the prestigious Gardzienice Center of Theatre practices founded by director Włodzimierz Staniewski) occasioned violent rioting outside Al-Hanager Theatre on the two successive days it was scheduled to perform. The show is designed for a chamber theatre with a maximum of 140 viewers flanking the performance space on opposite sides; consequently, the Hamager auditorium was ignored and its spacious stage housed both the performers and the audience. The spectators outside, however, had no inkling of that, or of the fact that half an hour before the performance started most of the seats had already been occupied by the members of the international jury, the festival's guests, Polish diplomats, the Italian nuns who provided the small church organ required by the troupe and a few privileged critics and theatre people. For the few remaining seats and standing areas, a handful of people was carefully picked out from the patient queues outside and sneaked in. The doors remained grimly shut and the performance started. By this time I had lost all appetite for the show and was feeling thoroughly guilty and ashamed of myself for being there; I longed to join the angry, frustrated people outside. It was a sultry, sweltering day, enough to try the patience of a lamb. The wonderful Gardzienice actors tramped in, one by one, in medieval attire, introducing the characters they were about to impersonate — King Mark, Tristan,

Isol, the elder, Isol, the younger, Merlin and Vivien. The mood was jovial, erotic, licentiously unbridled and deeply satiric. The actors, using the old Anglo-Saxon saga of Tristan and Isolde, strove to capture, through their bodies and voices, the freedom, daring abandon, and primitive, pagan passion of the gallards — those wondering scholars and clerics of the 12th and 13th centuries to whom the collection of songs and plays preserved in the medieval Latin manuscript known as the *Carmina Burana* (Songs of Beuren) is attributed.

The set matched the performance in simplicity, austerity, overwhelming energy and poetic vigour. Facing the small organ was the medieval wheel of fortune, topped by a platform for the king and flanked by two small cupboards which occasionally opened to reveal couples in amorous, erotic postures; a round wash tub on wheels served as a podium and, turned upside down and fitted with a sail, as a ship. The action progressed at a frenzied pace, absorbing all the senses in a whirl of sound and movement; but just as I was about to become totally engrossed in the magic of the show, the banging at the

two, instead of one, performances on the following day.

The promised five o'clock performance did not materialise. The company's second performance was scheduled for eight o'clock and by 6.30pm there was already a long queue of prospective viewers. I was there, but my daughter tells me that there was lots of weeping and wailing, fainting and screaming, and an ominous gnashing of teeth. Director Staniewski could not take it and threatened to cancel the show. At 8.30pm the audience gate-crashed into the theatre and occupied the auditorium; they sat there as though defying anyone to move them from their hard-won seats. Then a young woman stepped onto the stage and violently declaimed, "If you have a shred of pride you should all leave," whereupon she withdrew with a goodly chunk of the audience in her wake. Curiously she was spotted among the audience afterwards. A Lebanese actress in a violent, tearful rage, screamed abuses at the festival's organising committee, the Polish director, and the world at large. When director Hana Abdel-Fattah tried to pacify her, she simply hit him. What finally abated the storm was an announcement that the Gardzienice theatre company would give another performance of its *Carmina Burana* at 9.30pm.

Ugly as such scenes may seem, isn't it wonderful that theatre can still excite so much passion? The only other show to cause rows was the Netherlands' *Cool-de-Suck* (Cul-de-Sac?), subtitled "Living at the Dead End". Like the Polish show, it was at once simple, austere, hilariously funny and outrageously blasphemous.

The high points were a mock eucharist and the story of a meeting between Christ and Little Red Riding Hood in Paradise narrated by a clownish charlatan. In terms of content, it was a vastly depressing, nihilistic show; but the form, fashioned by the three actors' performance skills, was wonderfully exhilarating; as the actress, impersonating the monk, waded through the sea of bodies huddled together on the floor of Al-Qhad Theatre hall, parodying the ministering of bread and wine to the Christian flock, there was a true sense of holy communion, of blissful sharing. The appeal of the Netherlands' Subtheatre performance was such that the group had to give an unscheduled performance the following day.

Other shows worth mentioning are Singapore's *Descendants of the Eunuch Admiral* where the theme of castration, physically and metaphorically holds the stage, Switzerland's *The Eighth of a Millimetre Man* by the Carabombe Dance and Theatre Company, a Ukrainian crazy version of *Macbeth*, and Austria's *Time Sailors*. But of these and more next week.

Mursi Saad El-Din



Film editing, critics and the contemporary novel

Mahmoud El-Wardani reviews the more interesting titles to have been published in the past month

***Fraq Fi Tanga (Parting at Tanga)**, Abdel-Hai Mawdin. Casablanca: Manshurat El-Rabta, 1996. In his introduction to Moroccan novels, Abdel-Hai Mawdin's most recent work *Fraq Fi Tanga* (Parting at Tanga), critic Mohamed Barada lands the novel's accomplished structure and relevance to contemporary Morocco.

***El-Muntaj El-Cinema I** (Pratique de Montage), Albert Jurgenson and Sophie Brunet, tr May El-Taharri, ed Kafiq El-Sabban. Cairo: Arts Academy, 1996. *El-Muntaj El-Cinema I*, an invaluable handbook on film editing, is divided into three sections. The first tackles the diverse aspects of the craft, including the relationship between cinematography and editing, film sequences, the semantics of editing, the differences between editing feature and documentary films and the editing of comedy films.

The book also contains a section where Albert Jurgenson and Sophie Brunet de-

scribe their experiences both in the editing of film and in teaching the craft while the concluding section provides a close analysis of three films edited by Jurgenson.

***Dawan Al-Hawassa (Poetry of Ardent)**, vol. 2, Abu Tamman, ed Abd El-Moneim Saïd. Cairo: Mayar - Qasr El-Thaqafa, Treasures Series, 1996.

"Poetry of Ardent" is one of the more distinguished anthologies of classical Arabic verse, not least because its editor, Abu Tamman, is himself a distinguished poet. Thus, the second volume of the anthology, retains the thematic divisions of its predecessor — Genealogies; Lampoons of Women; Witticisms; Eulogies — written by Arab poets from a variety of ages and literary schools.

***El-Kiwaya Al-Yawm (The Novel Today)**, ed Malcolm Bradbury, tr Ahmed

Omar Shaheen. Cairo: General Egyptian Book Organisation, 1996.

We have often been informed that the novel is dead and buried. As to what contemporary European and American critics and novelists have to say on the matter, a catholic sample can be had in *The Novel Today*, edited by Malcolm Bradbury and now available in Arabic through Ahmed Omar Shaheen's competent translation. Among the writers who derive their views on the genre in this volume are Iris Murdoch, Saul Bellow and Doris Lessing.

***La Bad Ana Ahadar Harraka El-Karras (Someone Must Have Moved the Copybook)**, Youseff El-Mukhaid. Leħanah: Dar El-Gadid, 1996. This, Saudi Arabian poet Youseff El-Mukhaid's latest collection, comprises poems written in 1994 and 1995. His first collection was published in Riyadh,

his second in Cairo.

***Sakir El-Sakha (L'Alchimiste)**, Paulo Coelho, tr Bahaa Taher. Cairo: El-Hilal, 1996.

A slender novel by the Portuguese Paulo Coelho, *L'Alchimiste* has received various awards and was translated into a great many languages. It is, perhaps, the international literary hit of the past few years. This magical realist novel has at last come to us Arabic readers through the sensitive and impassioned translation by Egyptian novelist Bahaa Taher.

***Awar El-Bisafiq (Blaze of Violets)**, Mohammed Shukri. Cairo: Haifa Quṣur El-Thaqafa, 1996. This first published collection of short stories by Mohammed Shukri, *Awar El-Bisafiq* heralds a new voice on the fiction scene, one that refreshingly unfettered by clichés and capable of minting different formulas for age-old themes.

***Kitab El-Qissa El-Qassira (On Writing the Short Story)**, Cairo: El-Hilal, 1996.

What redeems this book from tedium are the many personal anecdotes the author draws from a 40-year career as a fiction editor. There are nine, somewhat pedantic chapters on different aspects of the short story — characterisation, style... etc — followed by six examples of the genre included in an attempt to illustrate the scope on theory.

***Ganoub El-Rawh (South of the Soul)**, Mohammed El-Ash'ari. Casablanca: Manshurat El-Rabta, 1996. Mohammed El-Ash'ari, who has published five collections of poetry, has now produced his first novel. In *Ganoub El-Rawh* he seeks to create not only the atmosphere

of rural life in Morocco, but to give voice to the inhabitants of the countryside whose lives and histories are all too often forgotten.

***El-Turath El-Masrouq (Stolen Heritage)**, George James, tr Shawki Galal. Cairo: Supreme Council of Culture, 1996.

In this comparative study, George James sets himself the task of deconstructing some of the historical distortions codified by the imperialist West as part of its subjugation of the peoples of Africa. Among the fallacies this book exposes is that civilisation, which is based on philosophical inquiry, was born in Greece. James makes a convincing case, supported with ample evidence, that the ancient Greeks were tutored in the basics of philosophical thought in Egyptian temples and places of learning. Thus the book recovers African heritage from the heavy shadows that for several centuries have obscured its perimeter and influence.

Plain Talk

In its Friday supplement *Al-Ahram* has been printing a series of previously unpublished writings by the late Tewfik El-Hakim. Simultaneously, the English newspaper have been writing about a new collection of previously unpublished early poems by T S Eliot, which appeared on 9 September.

Tewfik El-Hakim's posthumous writings — serialised in *Al-Ahram* and soon to be published in book form — are introduced by Salah Montasser, who revealed an interesting story behind the series. During his last days, El-Hakim had lost any taste of, and desire for, life due to what he perceived as his friends' and acquaintances' lack of concern. It was at this time that Montasser visited him, seeking an interview. And no sooner did the first interview appear in *Al-Ahram* than there was a flow of visitors, and the telephone never stopped ringing.

One day Tewfik El-Hakim surprised Montasser when he requested him to submit questions to which he would give the answers. Laughingly, Montasser asked him what his first action would be upon entering the afterlife. Two days later Montasser received six pages, obviously composed during El-Hakim's hospital stay, under the title "In the afterlife with Taha Hussein".

Tewfik El-Hakim had written what he imagined would be Hussein's own apology. And what is particularly revealing about this exercise were the replies El-Hakim gave to the charges that Hussein was something of a misogynist.

It was a reputation that had dogged Hussein following an attack he had once made on Hoda Sharrawi, the exponent of women's rights. But his attack was not against her, El-Hakim wrote in Hussein's defence, but against her concept of "rights". Certainly Hussein's attack caused a great deal of anger. Queen Nazli was, apparently, so annoyed that she instructed the grand chamberlain to sack him from his job at the National Library.

T S Eliot's posthumous poems, on the other hand, are altogether different. According to British press reports, it was Valerie Eliot, the poet's second wife, who asked Christopher Ricks to edit the poems, which contain passages of pornographic doggerel, bawdy jokes and a series of limericks and fragments.

Eliot himself never wanted these early poems published. When he sent the manuscripts to Ezra Pound who, apparently was an "avowed admirer of ribald verse" he accompanied them with a note that read: "You will find a great many sets of verse which have never been printed and which I am sure you will agree never ought to be printed, and in putting them in your hands, I beg you fervently to keep them to yourself and see they are never printed". It is clear that Eliot must have regarded these poems as unpublishable; yet they are being published and everyone eagerly awaits the opinion of critics "who may have a literary or political axe to grind".

Already some opinions have been expressed. A lecture on Eliot at Oxford and the author of *Eliot's Early Years* maintains that the pornographic verses underline the misogyny behind much of Eliot's writing, a defect which has been left in the dark in recent years as critics have focused on the poet's alleged anti-Semitism.

Anthony Julius, the author of a book on anti-Semitism in Eliot's work believes that the coarse verse is drawing on pernicious, racist ideas about sexual superiority.

It strikes me as a rare and unusual coincidence that two such similar events should have taken place at the same time, although hundreds of miles apart.

Mursi Saad El-Din

The north neglected the impoverished south and then made jokes about it. Militant Islamist violence was one way in which Upper Egypt told the rest of the country that the joke has soured. It was not its only response, however. In the last episode of its series on Upper Egypt, the Weekly looks at a much less publicised side of Sa'ida: A heritage of tolerance in which Muslims share in a Christian feast, and a future of hope in which community organisations act to empower people to take control of their destinies



Taking control of the future

Comprehensive development rather than charity is what most non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in Upper Egypt try to provide, writes Dina Ezzat

"We do not want to give people fish. We want to give them a book and teach them how to fish," explained Fatma Abdel-Hamid, chairperson of the Street Food Vendors Association in Minya (SFVA). In other words, public participation in development is the aim.

In every governorate in Upper Egypt, there are a few hundred non-governmental organisations (NGOs) involved in social work. Whether working with the poor, women, children, or the physically disabled, these NGOs try to help their target communities capitalise on the little assets they have to better their standard of living.

Ali Abdel-Kafi, his wife and his neighbour are among thousands of individuals who benefit from NGO activities in Al-Minya. Very few residents of Abu Hilal, one of the poorer neighbourhoods of Al-Minya City, have received any education or held a stable job. "We've always sold some kind of food on the street," said Abdel-Kafi.

This community's link to SFVA has lent them some stability. Instead of being chased away by the municipality agents, the three of them received a joint-loan that they used to start a small ice-cream business.

"Our lives really have changed since we started this project. We have a license from the municipality and we are aware of

the hygiene standards that we must follow," Abdel-Kafi said.

Through the SFVA, the three vendors learned more than how to make good, clean ice-cream. "They [SFVA] taught us general health and nutrition standards. Whenever we have a problem they sit with us and help us solve it," said Fatma, Abdel-Kafi's wife.

Giving loans, increasing health awareness and providing literacy courses are among the most popular NGO activities in the six governorates of Middle and Upper Egypt. From Beni Suef down to Aswan, NGOs are providing villagers with money to start small-scale projects like making cheese, hen houses, knitting and selling sweaters.

As a general rule most NGOs insist that a loan should not cover the entire capital of the project. "We do not want to turn people into concealed beggars," said Mohamed Mahmoud, member of the Association for Al-Dawla (Islamic Propagation of Faith).

"Comprehensive development is about making people stand on their own two feet and taking their lives into their own hands," he added.

This is not an easy task. People seem to expect full funding rather than auxiliary financial assistance.

Attracting the targeted communities is not easy, either. Members of the more con-

servative communities of Upper Egypt, NGO workers say, tend to be rather apprehensive of "strangers".

"This is why we count on recruiting local social workers from the villages," said Soheir Badie, chairperson of the Young Christian Women's Association, "because they are generally closer to the people."

Primarily it is time and confidence building that brings people round. According to Abdel-Hamid, the SFVA had a rough beginning: "They were not convinced we would help them and were worried that we were going to report their activities to the municipality."

But bit by bit the street food vendors came to believe in the good intentions of the association. As some of them became members of its board, the total number of the peddlers who benefit from SFVA's projects multiplied.

Another reason which puts people off seeking the help of NGOs is religion. All NGOs carrying Christian or Islamic names cater for the entire target communities regardless of the individuals' religious affiliation. "But in the beginning people tend to worry that these associations are there to convert them from Christianity to Islam or the other way round," said Badie.

But religious activities are sometimes included on the agenda of some of these religiously-affiliated NGOs. Islamic NGOs

help people make the pilgrimage to Mecca and provide Qur'anic classes. NGOs with Christian affiliation run Sunday schools.

But most NGOs working with the deprived communities of the south do not confine themselves to narrow scopes of work. For example, an association established to help the elderly may also provide literacy classes for the general population. Organisations that theoretically cater for women put children's projects on their agenda as well. And almost every NGO promotes family planning. Others have an environmental line. And several social workers are involved with more than one NGO at the same time.

"Since the main purpose of these NGOs is comprehensive development, we need to work on many things," said Youssra El-Emari, member of the Red Crescent and Young Muslim Women associations in Assiut.

Despite the common spheres of work, coordination among NGOs in each governorate is generally lacking. Preparations for big events like the International Conference on Population and Development or the Fourth World Conference on Women temporarily united the organisations in an effort to formulate a common agenda and select delegations, but in general, there is little coordination.

"Take family planning for example,"

said Sayeda Hamed of the Egyptian Society for Child Care in Aswan. "Everybody is talking about family planning, but there is no general plan whereby work is distributed among the different interested NGOs to make sure that all the villages of the governorate are covered."

Hamed believes that part of this problem has to do with the donor agencies. "Some of these donors are inflexible," she said.

For example, she said, the donors would give an NGO funds to educate villagers about basic health standards, yet refuse to invest some of this money in providing facilities that make the observance of these rules easier for the villagers. "Once we were in a village telling people about the importance of the cleanliness of bathrooms and to our shock we were told by the villagers that they have no toilets in their houses and that they relieve themselves either in their hen houses or in the fields," Hamed said. When Hamed went to the donors with this story, they told her it was not the agencies' role to build bathrooms.

Law 32 of 1964 which regulates NGO work is another obstacle. The law, which places all civil associations under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs, actually handicaps NGOs' access to funds because it subjects all donations and funding to the approval of the ministry. Mean-

while, the Ministry of Social Affairs, which is theoretically in charge of providing financial assistance to NGOs, has a very limited budget. According to one NGO worker, "The maximum they would give to any NGO is a few hundred pounds."

But Abdel-Salam El-Benna, director of the NGO bureau at the ministry, said that the law is necessary for the state to maintain its control over the NGOs.

"This is the heart of the problem," said Hamed. "NGOs should be working in collaboration with the government," she added.

Like many volunteers, Hamed believes that the development of Upper Egypt cannot be accomplished in isolation from NGOs.

The government, they argue, does not have the necessary resources or staff to implement a comprehensive development scheme in every village in the south.

"It is members of these associations who are close to the people. It is us who know what they really need. Therefore, the government should include us in the decision-making process regarding its development projects," Hamed said.

Volunteer work in Upper Egypt dates back to the early decades of the century. But over the last 15 years the number of NGOs working there has mushroomed.

Development's golden rule

For half a century the Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services has been a pillar of development in the south. Dina Ezzat investigates

field are further proof."

Bani Ghani, Beshai's village, is a good example of the communities "adopted" by CEOSS. The NGO encouraged small donations to start an environment preservation campaign for planting trees in the village and providing environment-friendly tips on waste disposal.

Inexpensive medical care services and literacy courses were also provided for the benefit of the Bani Ghani community. And it is only the very poor, who had nothing to contribute, that encounter the strictly charitable side of CEOSS. "For these we have the committee of the poor," said Kamel. This committee helps the deprived find

The Orthodox Copts were concerned that we were pulling away support from the Orthodox church to our church. And the Muslims were worried that we would try and convert them."

Now, CEOSS is not only working with Muslim and Christian communities but also with NGOs of both religions. In the lead up to big events like the International Conference on Population and Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, CEOSS acted as a focal point for the southern governorates.

Actually, in its awareness campaigns, CEOSS gets the support of clergy men of both religions. In the campaign against female

Sarah Ahmed Youssef, is a young businesswoman in El-Hakaroub, a tiny village in Aswan. In her family's modest mud house, she has converted her bedroom into a workshop and managerial base. Vibrant coloured threads of blue, green, white and red are scattered all over the place. Sarah is one of the first women in Aswan to obtain a loan from the Women's Initiative Fund (WIF).

WIF is a small business development project, managed by FIT (Foundation for International Training) and funded by CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency). The impetus behind the project is to help women of lower socio-economic background, like Sarah, set up their own independent businesses, gain extra revenue and achieve self-sufficiency by providing them with credit, training and technical assistance.

Qena was the site of WIF's first project. Last May, Minister for Social Affairs Amal Osman opened an LE3 million WIF

said that she has gained a lot of confidence in communicating with the outside world. "Previously, I didn't really interact with a lot of the people in the community because I had no reason to. Now I have to know my market, I have to look for the best deals when buying my material and I have to make sure I know how to manage my business so that nobody can say, 'see, we told you that woman would fail'."

Mahmoud Fouad Ali, the economic activities co-coordinator for WIF in Aswan, explained that the fund's long-term goal is to encourage women to see themselves as independent beings, self-reliant and able to make their own decisions, both for themselves and their businesses.

However, WIF's enthusiasm about women's empowerment is not shared by everyone, least of all villagers in Aswan who have recently become acquainted with the project for the first time.

At a workshop organised by WIF in Benban, a remote village in Aswan, the fieldworkers introduced the idea to a female-dominated audience. They were met with silence at first, and then a multitude of questions: "Why does it have to be the woman who takes charge of it, why not her husband or her father?" "Will the woman be held responsible if the business fails?" They then made some suggestions for traditional women's work, like raising poultry, opening a dairy shop, making sweets, sewing and weaving.

When the WIF fieldworkers suggested making furniture from palm fronds or running T-shirt workshops and printing shops, the women were stunned. One of the men said, "We won't be able to talk to them afterwards... they'll be all puffed up with their own importance." Yet a significant number of women showed interest, though not necessarily for the right reasons, pointed out Eissa Mustafa, marketing consultant for WIF in Aswan. "Sometimes we feel that it is really the husband's idea and the wife is just there as a mouthpiece for him. Such cases are rejected immediately."

It is not always a women-only or anti-male project, insist WIF staff. Men are encouraged to play a major role, but a woman must play the principal role.

"We usually try to create a complementary working situation between wife and husband or sister and brother. For instance, Soumaya retails electrical appliances. She buys the stock, sells it and makes the profit, while her brother, an electrician, helps at the shop by repairing damaged appliances. It is very important to us that the husband consents to his wife's project, since he may try to impose endless restrictions on her if he is not happy with her work, no matter how determined she is to continue with it," Mustafa said.

Richard Karathers, WIF director in Egypt, asserted that if the project has proven anything, it is how distorted the traditional Egyptian woman is: down-trodden, oppressed, ignorant, and passive. "As we began to talk to women in Qena, we discovered that this was not an accurate representation at all... they didn't feel there were any constraints to their progress that they themselves couldn't overcome and they were excited about having the chance to run their own small businesses," he said.

shelter and work. It also provides them with food and clothes.

But they will not receive assistance forever; they must stand on their own feet.

"For example, we would give them a hen house to start," Kamel explained.

And it is for Muslims and Christians alike that the CEOSS services are provided.

"People do not think of us as anything other than what we really are: an NGO that works in development," said Medhat Ayad, another member of the Minya office.

But it was not always like that. In the beginning CEOSS was received as primarily a religious association. According to one member, "The Evangelical Copts thought that we will give them generous donations.

genital mutilation and that against *dakha' batali* — a wedding eve defilement of the bride at the hands of a midwife — CEOSS social workers who were touring the villages were accompanied by sheikhs and priests who supported the argument against those unhealthy practices.

For the present and near future, Reverend Habib says CEOSS will focus on two areas.

First is development in partnership with communities and other NGOs.

The other road which CEOSS will take is that of building dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Habib is convinced that "something serious should be done in this area". He is hoping to establish a centre to promote dialogue.

Her first step was to launch a modest exhibition of her work, the products of which she marketed in Cairo. Embroidered tablecloths, coffee table mats, mirror decorations, and plant hangers form the bulk of her work. "Once my business takes off, I want to put my new ideas into practice. There are a lot of non-traditional items which I would like to attempt," she added.

Aside from the profits, which are limited at this stage, Sarah



كذا من الأصل

Days of piety and fun

Sherine Nasr attended this year's event

"I am sorry all tickets to Assiut are reserved for the next three days," said the clerk at the railway station. "There is a big *mouldid* going on in Assiut now," he explained.

The clerk was referring to the feast of the Virgin Mary held every August at the convent dedicated to her on the mountain of Assiut, almost 10km west of the city.

The *mouldid*, celebrated from 7 August to 22 August, breathes life into the normally peaceful mountain surrounding the popular convent.

By mid-August, life at the convent redoubles with activity as Christian and Muslim pilgrims from all over the country gather to honour the Virgin.

Following an age-old tradition, the faithful congregate in downtown Assiut for the three-hour walk to the convent. As the early morning hours pass, 2am the pilgrims make their way towards the foot of the mountain.

"This is how we like to celebrate the Virgin Mary's *mouldid*. I have been doing it since I was seven years old," said Mary Boulous, an English-language teacher from Assiut. "There are people as far as the eye can see. We chant hymns together as we walk along the road."

As the faithful reach the mountain, they pause for rest before ascending the 100 metres to the Church of St Mary.

The convent is one of the main attractions in Assiut, according to Ragaa El-Tahawi, governor of Assiut. The most ancient part of the convent is the extensive rock-hewn cave inside the mountain where, according to local folklore, the Holy Family sought refuge before returning to Palestine.

Originally a quarry, the cave was later used as a haven from the annual Nile floods that inundated the lands below the mountain. "The quarry itself dates back to 2500 BC," explained the convent's Father Loula. "But within 100 years of the death of Jesus the site came to be used as a church by the nascent Christian community."

"Prayers of the faithful have been recited here for nearly 1,900 years," added Father Loula.

Nearly 3.5 million pilgrims, Christians as well as Muslims, are estimated to visit the convent each year — half that number during the 15 days of the Virgin's *mouldid* alone.

During the feast of the Virgin, the convent compound quickly fills to capacity with those seeking accommodations as near to the church as possible. To comfortably lodge the pilgrims, a large number of three or four-room flats, with two bathrooms and full facilities, were built within the complex.

"We have attended the *mouldid* ever since we were little children. Now we can rent a flat and spend the two weeks inside the convent," said Wadie Shaker from Luxor. "Here, we feel as if we are at home," chipped in Mrs Shaker.

Her husband goes the whole year without any extra holidays in order to be able to attend the fifteen days of the *mouldid*. "For us it is the big holiday of the year. This is not only the time for spirituality. It is the season of fun and recreation, as well," he said.

Before the flats were built, visitors were welcomed into the homes of those living near the convent.

"It was natural for a family living near the convent to host another visiting family till the end of the feast. Every year we were provided with accommodation in one of those houses," said Hania Azmy, a 60-year-old housewife who has attended the event for as long as she can remember.

The tradition has survived up to this time. Ninety per cent of the town residents welcome St Mary's visitors either for free or for a nominal fee. "We do it for the sake of Virgin Mary," explained one of the home owners.

Residents inside the convent wake up at 6am to attend the daily two-hour mass. In the afternoon, the faithful await the *doura*, the procession of deacons bearing an icon of the Virgin through the convent. A priest carrying an incense-burner at the end of a chain swings it repeatedly in front of the icon. The spirited religious chanting that accompanies the *doura*

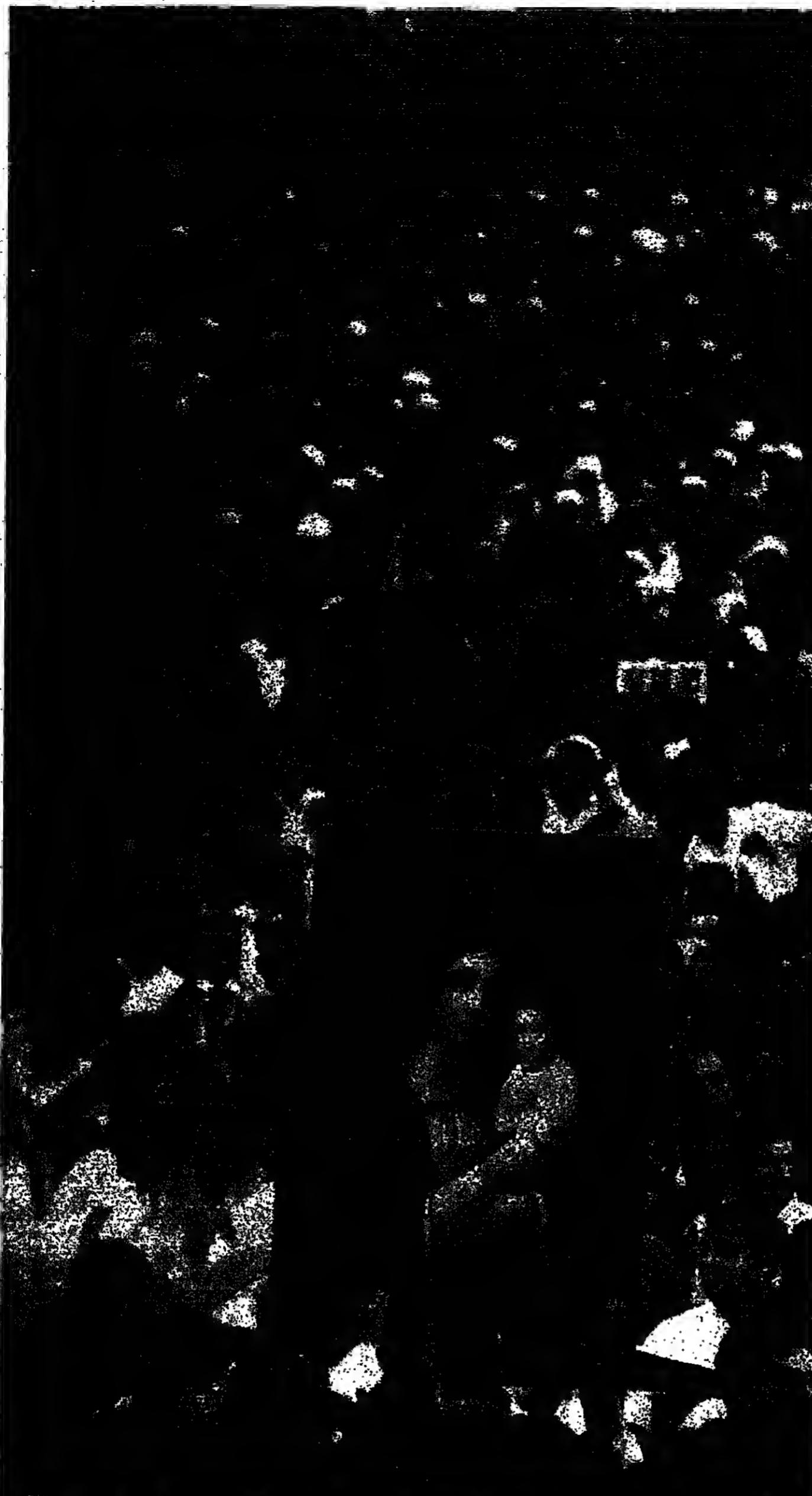


photo: Sherine Nasr

Prayers of the faithful have been recited here for 1,900 years'

Nearly 3.5 million pilgrims, Christians and Muslims, visit the convent [of the Virgin Mary] every year

She is ours, too," said Helali Ali Masoud, a carpenter. Helali, a Muslim from Abu Tig, was accompanied by his daughter, Hana. Helali never misses the big *doura* at the end of the feast before leaving for home. "I have done so for the last 25 years. I spend 50 pounds on portraits of the Virgin and St George, as gifts for my family and the neighbours back home," he said.

Governor El-Tahawi, a regular visitor at the *mouldid*, commented that it is a living example of how readily Muslims and Christians get together during these events. "It is proof of how easily the two main elements of society melt together in one pot," he said.

As the *mouldid* approaches, a temporary village springs up below the convent as the ma-

thing but the kitchen sink.

Atef Bekheet from Sohag has a particular spot he returns to year after year where he pitches his tent to sell his wares. "I arrive 15 days before the feast begins to guarantee my place and pay LE100 for the square metre site," he said.

The fruit and vegetable vendors have a more mobile operation to peddle their wares. They rely on their donkey carts to ferry goods around to the *mouldid* celebrants.

Every year a giant wheel occupying a large area in a corner of the marketplace guides the more adventurous to the fun fair. The ride operators live a nomadic life, travelling from one feast to another. "We spend our entire lives wandering. As soon as this feast is over we'll

pack up our stuff and move to another," said Ashraf Ahmed, a ride operator. "I have visited almost every governorate in Egypt attending *mouldids*."

Water carriers are among the more common sights during the feast as they make their rounds providing the tent dwellers and the campers with water.

Amro Mesha, at 25, is among the oldest of the water carriers. With his many water skins tied to his *galabiya*, Mesha is the living embodiment of a bygone age. He has spent the last 70 years of his life on the circuit. "I buy my water skins from Sohag and tour all the *mouldids* in Upper Egypt," he said. "You'll have noticed that I have no set price for the water for I do not sell it. The thirsty one pays as he wishes as charity."

On the last day of the feast the pilgrims assemble in the convent for the big *doura*. The procession departs from the Church of St Mary at dusk and moves along the main road to the convent. Deacons in white gowns walking in four straight lines precede another group of deacons carrying a huge icon of the Virgin and the Holy Child. They are joined by the faithful chanting hymns.

Bishop Mikhail, the head of the monastery, accompanied by a group of priests in black gowns, appears holding a large cross to bless the gathering. As the procession approaches, a deafening cheer greets them and white pigeons are symbolically freed to fly over the assembly. "The pigeons refer to Virgin Mary. Both are symbols of peace," said one of the deacons. The end of the procession marks the closing of the feast.

The return to the city of Assiut — ordinarily a 15-minute drive — was a task that took three full hours. And, once again in Assiut, we discovered getting back to Cairo would prove to be no easy job, either.

"The only available seats are for the Saturday morning train," said the smiling clerk. It was Wednesday. "The *mouldid* of the Virgin has just ended," he explained.



photo: Sherine Nasr

The joke's on all of us

"Did you hear the one about the Sa'idi who..." is the start of a great many Egyptian jokes. But is it really funny, asks Sahar El-Bahr

It is common for nations to select certain groups, whether neighbouring nationalities or ethnic minorities, to be the butt of their jokes. The Irish, Polish-Americans and Belgians, for example, are all used to being lampooned in this way. These people, the jokes tell you, are stupid, naive and generally to blame for anything that goes wrong. In Egypt, "Marrak wa'idi Sa'idi," or "Once, an Upper Egyptian," signals the Egyptian version — the Sa'idi joke.

The Sa'idi joke has endless variations. Even Upper Egyptians' understandable anger at being continually portrayed as brainless country bumpkins has been used in a recent joke:

"Once, there was this Upper Egyptian who got really furious about Sa'idi jokes. So he collected them all in a sack and threw it into the sea. But before he had time to turn his back, he saw the fish jumping up out of the water, laughing at the jokes."

Sa'idi jokes have been around for a long time, like the one which began doing the rounds at the time the tram appeared in Cairo. Arriving at Ataba Square, an Upper Egyptian was amazed at the sight of the tram. It was not long before he was approached by one of the many confidence tricksters that used to hang around the area, who asked him if he wouldn't like to be the owner of this fine piece of engineering. The Sa'idi, the story goes, happily agreed, and handed over a tidy sum of money.

The theme was taken up by the film and television industry. *Kabir Al-Rahimya Gely* features the story of the man who bought the tram, and in *Al-Ataba Al-Khadra*, famous comedian Ismail Yassin comes from Upper Egypt to buy not only the tram, but the whole of Ataba Square.

Not surprisingly, Upper Egyptians are unhappy with their media representation. "It's not just these two films," complained Nazih Anani, an Upper Egyptian engineer. "Upper Egyptian men are always portrayed as stupid, with nothing to do except pursue vendettas, and the women are always ugly."

The image of the foolish southerner is one that they are quick to debunk. After all, Gamal Abdel-Nasser, great figures of the age of Egyptian enlightenment, Taha Hussein and Abbas El-Aqqad, modern poets, Abdel-Rahman El-Babouly and Amal Domogol "and countless other luminaries of Egyptian history," hail from the south, said Yassef Ali, an Upper Egyptian doctor.

Half the ministerial posts, and one-third of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council seats are occupied by southerners, pointed out Mohamed Abdel-Raouf, an engineer. He has become so incensed by the jokes' implied prejudice that he has applied to the Ministry of Social Affairs to form an association to protect his fellow southerners from their effects.

Ensayat Fahmy is an Upper Egyptian housewife who moved to Cairo with her husband three years ago. She believes that much of the stereotyping derives from the fact that many Upper Egyptians in Cairo are poor and uneducated, and have come to the city looking for work. "But there is a difference between naivety and stupidity," she stressed. A rural southern life is undoubtedly very different from one lived in Cairo. But southerners' inexperience of the big city should not be viewed as stupidity, she argued.

But amidst southerners' criticism of northerners' attitudes, one indisputable fact remains: Egyptians tell good jokes. Jokes are a means of communication, and the best ones reflect something of the human experience. In Egypt, for every Sa'idi joke, there is a political joke. It may be unfortunate that the two have sometimes become intertwined.

Through humour, Upper Egyptians have found themselves blamed for all manner of ills, including Egypt's defeat in the 1967 war. In fact, according to Adel Hamouda's book, *The Political Joke*, Sa'idi jokes enjoyed a renaissance following the 1967 defeat. One reason for this, Hamouda maintains, is that President Gamal Abdel-Nasser was himself from Upper Egypt. For Egypt's legions of satirists, Sa'idi quickly became synonymous with Nasser.

"This was a tremendous period for jokes," agreed Hamid Ibrahim, a researcher at the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Research. "Jokes are a defence mechanism, and a means of expressing political dissent."

Nasser's minister of defence, Abdel-Hakim Amer, was also from Upper Egypt. During this period, Ibrahim explained, he was viewed as the man responsible for the defeat. For a time he was the butt of every joke, a symbol of failure and incompetence, whether related to the 1967 war or not.

Nasser himself was aware of the potential power of the political joke. Perhaps feeling vulnerable in the heightened tension of the times, he once told a foreign correspondent: "Egyptians have a talent for making jokes about anything and everything. They philosophise through jokes. But our enemies could make use of this, so we should be more aware."

There is one very odd fact about the Egyptian lampooning of the Sa'idi: when Egyptians joke about stupid southerners, they are actually referring to two thirds of the country's population. It seems only logical to view this as a reflection of the isolation of Upper Egypt, the unbalanced allocation of resources and the strength of the north-south divide. According to Ibrahim, the jokes could exacerbate the potential for seeing the Sa'idi as the other — an innocent, simple person who wears different clothes and does not really belong to modern Egypt. This could thus increase differences, and indifference, between north and south.

"It's not our fault that the Delta area used to consume a large percentage of the national income allocated for development while Upper Egypt had the leftovers or nothing at all," said Abdel-Kahim El-Ghoul, a member of the People's Assembly for Nag'a Hanana.

Jokes used to be told about all rural people, he continued. But when the process of industrialisation began in the Delta, the jokes began to concentrate on the more remote Upper Egyptians. "They started with a few jokes and spread like an epidemic," agreed Youssif Abdel-Mohsen, professor of psychology at Cairo University. He fears that being constantly made fun of could have a bad psychological effect on the Upper Egyptians, causing a lack of confidence, increased aggression and feelings of isolation.

El-Ghoul hotly disputes this. "We sometimes tell these jokes against ourselves," he said. "They have nothing to do with reality. People tell jokes about us because we stick to old ways which others consider backward. We could tell plenty of jokes about people in the Delta too, but we are serious people, and we don't have time on our hands to sit around making up jokes."

A night to remember

In a fairy-tale setting worthy of Scheherazade, Mrs Suzanne Mubarak watched as 600 couples celebrated an en masse wedding on the Cairo Stadium hockey pitch. **Imas Mazhar** attended

A unique three-hour festival was organized by the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports (SCYS), under the auspices of Mrs Mubarak.

More than 10,000 spectators clapped and danced to oriental music at a wedding reception for 1,200 brides and grooms. Mrs Mubarak, the guest of honour at the televised event, addressed the newly-weds, her image projected onto two massive screens located on each side of the pitch. She expressed her delight at attending the ceremony and her happiness in sharing this special night.

Mrs Mubarak said that this unique event was organized to transform a sporting establishment into a happy and idyllic scene: the wonderful start of a new life for 600 couples from all over the country.

The festival began with the entry of the married couples in two groups, 300 from the right and 300 from the left side of the pitch. Clad in traditional wedding garb — white gowns for the brides and formal suits for the grooms — the couples marched to the music of the Damietta wedding procession, accompanied by whistles and ululations from relatives packed into grandstands decorated with pink and white satin drapes and bunches of balloons. They were then seated, three couples to a table.

Adding to the joy of the festival were the many friendships born and cemented on that starry night. The event joined the celebration of



matrimony to the opportunity for the newly-weds, who had come from all corners of Egypt, to get to know compatriots.

The *sherbat* (syrup-sweet beverage served at weddings) was then poured and handed round by five-star stewards.

The ceremony proper started with a magnificent laser show directed by Sherif Yousri, assisted by 12 German experts. According to Yousri, the idea for organizing this wedding came up last Ramadan, when President Hosni Mubarak was attending the finale of the Ramadan Horus Club soccer tournament. "In the presence of Dr Abdel-Moneim Emara, head of

the SCYS, the subject was brought up and President Mubarak agreed to organize the wedding to help many young people fulfil their dream of getting married. Mrs Mubarak then agreed to be the hostess of this festival, and we soon started preparing for this unique occasion," he said.

The couples said the party was better than anything they could have organized themselves, especially the fireworks, the laser show and the star-studded singers. Most of the couples were junior public-sector employees who live on salaries of less than 300 pounds per month, and would have found it well-nigh impossible to organize such lavish festivities individually.

Three top singers entertained the wedding parties: Ihab Tawfiq, Hamed, and Hafiz. The newly-weds were happy to sing and dance along with the singers, especially since none of them could have dreamt of hiring these singers, whose fees are in the triple digits, at private weddings.

Not should those who missed out on the celebration, and are yearning to tie the knot with that special someone, despair. Similar festivals will be organized every two years — a chance in a lifetime to tie the knot in good company, and in lavish style, without splashing out on astronomical sums. Love is most definitely in the air...

Many young Egyptians want to get married — but can't. **Mariz Tadros** finds out why

A suitable boy — and a penthouse, too

It was the ring, or maybe the ceramics, or possibly the furniture that put their marriage on hold. When Marwa and Sherif (not their real names) got engaged, they never thought, in their wildest dreams, that tying the knot could be such a grueling job, or that they would still be engaged two years later. "We had every imaginable problem," sighs Marwa. Everything, from her choice of partner to her choice of home ceramics, came under the spotlight as she tried to balance her family's expectations with her own happiness.

It was the same old story: "He is not good enough for our daughter" — which materially translates into: "My daughter is worth much more than that..." When the couple decided what they wanted to get married, Marwa remembers, "my parents didn't even want to meet him or have anything to do with him because they felt he wasn't from a socially well-to-do family (or at least not as socially prominent as ours). When I asked them why, they gave me ridiculous excuses."

Eventually Marwa's agonizing efforts to win over her parents bore fruit, and Sherif was allowed to bring his parents to meet hers. "My mother insisted that he come with us to prepare for the reception. She made it a point that the salted breadsticks be bought from one pastry shop, the cakes and tarts from another and, of course, the sweets from another shop." With resigned mutterings of "whatever you say," "as you wish" and "you know best," Sherif and Marwa managed to survive, although money seemed to be a real issue.

Engagement plans were frozen until Sherif could meet his future mother-in-law's expectations for the *shabk* (the gold jewelry traditionally given to the bride). Eventually, the engagement took place, but it was followed by a long series of obstacles, most memorable of which was the flat. "It's cute," pleaded Marwa. "It's 'horrible,' lashed out her mother. In the end they agreed to the flat, but everything in it, from the infrastructure to the walls and furniture, had to be changed. They also had to fix the plumbing, but doing that required that they change the ceramics as well. If they planned to change the ceramics, they might as well change all the floor tiles and repaint the walls, reasoned her parents. Since Sherif's family was not in a position to help him financially, his burden increased dramatically with these adjustments. Sherif, like many young men about to get married, joined a *gama'ya* — a group-saving project where a specific sum of money is taken from each of the participants every

month and given in a lump sum to every individual on a rotating basis. Every money-saving scheme they could think of, from painting the walls themselves to buying "grade two" ceramics (which have defects in 10-20 per cent of the tiles, but are often chosen by couples on a tight budget since the imperfections can easily be disguised by a skilled tile-layer) were rejected by her mother. "Grade one ceramics are a must for my daughter," she insisted, solemnly vowing to pick up the bill. She later reneged on her offer at the last minute.

"In the end he paid for everything," sighed Marwa, who hopes that all the wedding preparations will be over by winter.

Marwa and Sherif's marriage saga is hardly exceptional. Many couples today are forced into very long engagements against their wishes, due to skyrocketing marriage expenses — a burden difficult to shoulder by any couple on an average salary. The general feeling that people aren't getting married as frequently as they used to is confirmed by the latest statistical data released by the Central Agency for Public Mobilisation and Statistics (CAPMAS): in 1988, the overall national percentage of marriages was estimated at 8.3. By 1989, it had dropped to 7.6 per cent, and by 1991, 7.3 per cent. Marriage has now reached an all-time low at 7.1 per cent.

Sadeed Ibrahim, professor of sociology at the American University in Cairo and director of the Ibn Khaldun Centre for Development, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that fewer marriages are caused by a combination of deep-rooted social problems. "The continuing drop in marriages is neither sporadic nor inexplicable," he notes. Ibrahim suggests that the internal fabric of Egyptian society has been shaken by a shift from one political and socio-economic order to another. "This has most affected lower-middle-class youth. They have felt the implications of such changes most strongly, especially the economic facets." Televisions, refrigerators and cars were on the unaffordable "dream list" 10 or 15 years ago, but today, in many modest urban settings, the same objects are seen as essential. "That's one reason the militant Islamic message is so attractive. You don't need to live up to these materialistic expectations, you just need a small room and a floor mat to get married," explains Ibrahim.

For the ruling classes, on the other hand, marriage is still the same story, with classic dramas of "whether to live in a 300- or 400-square-meter apartment, and whether to go to the French Riviera or on a safari for the honeymoon," Ibrahim

says. As for the middle class, "they seem to be hanging between the two (upper and lower classes) — they have no moral value stabilisation with which to confront these changes. While they are drawn to Western materialism, they still resist the Western value system that goes with it."

Some would argue that many marriages are delayed today for want of that crucial element: an appropriate mate. Adel Mohamed from the Holy Union Association believes that "our society is facing a real marriage dilemma today which affects all groups to varying degrees." The proof, she claims, is in the statistics: a third of young adults between 18 and 35 are unable to get married. Mohamed recalls that when the association was first set up in 1958, it was known as the Egyptian Association for the Support of the Family and its role was just that — to support existing family units. Now, however, it is responsible for facilitating the actual formation of family units. "Young men and women were having a difficult time finding the right marriage partners," notes Mohamed.

Similar marriage agencies are surfacing all across Cairo. Some of these are situated in upscale suburbs like Heliopolis and charge up to LE2,000 per person, with no guarantee of finding a desirable match. Mohamed believes that, despite the expansion and fragmentation of some communities, and perhaps because of this expansion, young Egyptians can no longer have recourse to the traditional ways of finding a suitable partner.

According to Mohamed, the clash between "modern" and "traditional" ways of courting and marriage have taken their toll on a number of communities. Many young Egyptians, particularly women, have passed the marriage age. "The number of unmarried women in their forties is alarming," says Mohamed, who, while admitting that the spinster stereotype reflects prejudice against women, contends that it refers to a social reality of gender expectations.

Mohamed argues that despite the feminists' battle to raise a woman's marriage age, marriageability continues to be determined according to the biological clock. "Whether feminists like it or not, women reach the peak of their fertility in their early twenties," she insists. This tends to be problematic — by the time a man is financially able to marry, after years in the Gulf or many more saving money at home, he wants to marry someone 10 years younger than himself, while women want to marry someone only a few years

older. At her agency, Mohamed says that "42-year-old men habitually request to marry 25-year-old and 50-year-old women to marry someone no older than 35."

Both Ibrahim and Mohamed agree that the transformation of gender identity and role, influenced by an Egyptianized form of feminism, has greatly affected men and women's ideas of the ideal partner. They emphasise that women's education has raised their material expectations and "the higher their expectations, the fewer choices available to them," points out Mohamed. Alternately, men are looking for a mix of Western and traditional qualities in their future brides. "Some middle- and upper-class men want a well-educated, well-spoken girl who is socially presentable but submissive in the household, and can quickly adopt the role played by his mother — that of housekeeper and child rearing — an ideal which doesn't always suit the women," she continues.

"Don't give me excuses about girls who are too liberated and men who can't stand that because they are too traditional — that is absolute rubbish," scoffs Dr Azzia Korayem, professor at the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Research. "Yes, there is a marriage crisis for the majority of poor Egyptians," she says, "but it has little to do with finding the right girl and much to do with having enough money to marry her."

She contends that under stable socio-economic circumstances, there would be room for natural selection. Because competition to find a husband can be so intense, a liberal-minded girl may find herself forced to exhibit conservative beliefs and mannerisms to ensure that she fulfills the expectations of a conservative man who can afford to marry her.

"If marriage was not so financially unfeasible for so many young people," she continues, "there would be enough variation to provide a balanced selection. The cost of an apartment, one of the fundamental marriage pre-conditions, is more than a young man can afford today, or is likely to be able to afford in a decade. So he has to seek financial assistance from his parents, which can translate into an implicit or explicit intervention in his choice of partner."

More young Egyptians would be able to marry if the government would guarantee better salaries, housing that does not take up more than 20 per cent of their income, and stable economic conditions.



Requiem for a house

Our house will be the last one to go on the street where we used to live. Closed for many years, it has been living on borrowed time while high-rise buildings sprout up around it practically every day.

Until now it has aged quietly, albeit not very graciously, nestled in its overgrown garden, half-covered by the creepers, the crawlers and the ficus trees, which somehow always did manage to defy our gardener's efforts to keep them under control. I remember him deeply resenting my mother for not allowing him to trim these particular trees into squares, pyramids and spheres or letting him give the hedges a regulation army flat-top.

On the rare occasions when I stop to pay the house a quick visit, there is always a happy memory beckoning and I sit on the back steps under the pergola, listening in the silence that has now engulfed it — a silence not unlike that surrounding the sick and the very old.

I remember our house when it was alive and well. The back porch was concealed by a great deal of greenery and led through a wrought-iron door to the main reception rooms on the ground floor, and further on, to the staircase of a separate apartment on the roof. This particular staircase was inhabited by bats at night. They never bothered me, and as a teenager I had no problems using this second entrance in the hope that my parents would not hear me coming in past my curfew; my sister, however, was absolutely terrified of the little beasts, firmly believing that they would get entangled in her hair. She would then rather face my mother's ire than sneak in, unheard, and risk encountering one of the blood-sucking creatures. For years, my brother and I took an inordinate pleasure, returning late from some party, in rushing up stealthily behind her as we reached the pergola, and suddenly screaming "BAT". Seeing her scramble up the stairs, covering her head with her evening bag, was worth being told off for our inability to stick to our schedule.

Now that the house is abandoned, the bats hang undisturbed, huddled upside down in the growing shadows, as the sun sets on the sleepy garden.

How many creatures, I wonder, are still living in this small patch of greenery, soon to disappear, choked by the concrete bunkers? Undoubtedly, they have sensed that the shutters are no longer thrown open every morning and that many spiders are spinning their webs across the doors and windows. Do they know that their bushy retreat is soon to be destroyed, replaced by a steel and concrete contraption meant to accommodate the largest number of people in the least possible space? A human beehive will be built where bees used to buzz freely. Are the insects already gone, poisoned by the fumes emitted by the large buses which now ply the street, or are they there, hidden, biding their time until the magnolia tree is felled? And where is the chameleon which had been a favourite pet and had occupied us for a whole summer, long ago?

Less alarming than the bats, Anatole the chameleon lived in one of the trees at the front of the garden. He was completely tame and we often carried him on our arms, watching him change colour to match our shirts. We never carried him when we wore stripes or checks because, my brother had warned us, he could go mad if confronted with patterns. In the beginning we killed flies and offered them to him but he turned his nose up at the treat. "He only eats live ones," my brother, our adviser in things scientific, informed us. Catching flies and keeping them alive was another matter altogether and, having had to admit failure at such a delicate task, one day we decided to leave our bedroom window slightly ajar, allowing several flies in, then sneak Anatole upstairs for a feast. It did not work as well as we had anticipated, however, Anatole showing reluctance to crawl onto the window pane. "He is afraid to become transparent like the glass and disappear," explained my brother. Not wanting to lose Anatole under such tragic circumstances, we took him back to his tree and from that day on he was left to fend for himself.

Our garden had to offer than flowers, shrubs, little animals and insects. It also gave us fruit — not much, to be sure, but fruit nonetheless. We were the proud owners of a mango tree, our most precious possession, which my father had planted the day my brother was born, the only male among numerous females. To be honest, the mangoes were not the best, but to us they were special, coming from our very own tree. Every year, as soon as the fruit would begin to ripen, my grandmother would take her post at the kitchen window, where the best crow's nest view of the surroundings could be had. She would watch for the young intruders who dared to climb the gate and attempt to shake the tree in the hope of a treat.

In later years, her task was rendered more difficult because the bushes grew so fast that they spilled out onto the other side of our fence. Consequently, a few mangoes became accessible from the street side. She never bought into the theory that what grows on the outside belonged to everybody; instead, she insisted that our gardener should stand watch. By the time the mangoes were ready to be picked, she knew exactly how many had grown that year and demanded that every single one be brought into the house, regardless of the fact that we did not always want to eat them. She considered it her duty to protect our patrimony. To this day, and although the house is deserted now, my mother goes to collect some of the mangoes every year. Now, however, I eat every single one — in memory of times gone by.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Fish sayadeya

Ingredients:
1kg fish fillets
2 cups rice (soaked for half an hour)
1 cup white flour
3 onions (finely chopped)
3 onions (coarsely chopped and fried brown in oil)
1 tbsp. crushed garlic
3 tbsp. lemon juice
3 tsp. ground cumin
1 tbsp. tomato paste
2 cups frying oil
100 gms. fried almonds (optional)
Salt + pepper

Method:
Wash the fish fillets and place them in a large plate beside each other then marinade them with the garlic, cumin, salt, pepper and the lemon juice and leave aside. Strain the soaked rice and fry the finely chopped onion in oil then add two cups of water, the tomato paste, a pinch of cumin, salt and pepper and bring to boil. Stir and add the rice. When it absorbs the liquid lower the heat and leave to cook over a simmering ring. In the meantime, coat the fish fillets with flour and deep fry them in oil and place on kitchen blotting paper. In a serving plate, put alternately some rice, then one layer of fish, then some almonds, until you are through with the whole quantity. Add the fried onions on top and serve with *tehina* and a nice green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Beneath the trellis

Dappled sunlight, distant fountains? Not quite, writes Nigel Ryan

What lies at the bottom of the garden? Well, it all depends on where, and who and why. At the bottom of Le Grillon's garden is a waterfall, constructed out of what looks suspiciously like polished wood. Unfortunately it gives less the feeling of a quiet fountain gurgling gently in the corner of some herbaceous paradise than of a burst pipe. Gush gush rather than trickle trickle, and always the threat of falling plaster.

Le Grillon's garden is enclosed, with walls of reconstituted stone into which are inserted those pointy arches that pass as Islamic. It is roofed by a trellis supporting a rather vigorous creeper of whose botanical and other names I must confess ignorance. But it grows and grows and grows, and in places has a rather attractive gnarled bark. These are the joys of the garden.

But there is more to Le Grillon than meets the eye. There is a large dining room that is invariably empty, and there is a bar, dark or intimately lit depending on your mood. At the garden, though, that remains the most frequented part of the complex. At night it fills to overflowing with a motley assortment of serious drinkers and their associates, happy to punctuate orders of drinks with the occasional platter of mezze.

At lunch time the garden is deserted. And though the creeper keeps out much of the sunlight enough filters through to lend the place a gloomy and somewhat desultory aspect. The feeling is decidedly out of season, and because it is accidental it is slightly — but only slightly — sun.

Le Grillon, 8 Kasr El-Nile Street, Downtown. Tel: 743 114

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

1. Circle segments (4)	44. Type of parasitic insects (4)
4. Defense; invocation (4)	45. Hard-hearted; strict (5)
5. Expansive (5)	46. Weapons (3)
14. Meet eyeball to eyeball (4)	47. Smear; light blow (3)
15. Tolled (4)	50. Extinct flightless bird of New Zealand (3)
16. Stab (5)	51. Wet (?)
17. Mine entrance (4)	55. Minusc (3)
18. Part time; not essential (10)	58. Miss Gardner (3)
20. US servicemen, abb. (3)	60. Shoemaker's pointed tool (3)
21. Perceve (3)	61. Chopping tool (3)
22. — pro nobis (3)	62. Take a turn for the worse (10)
23. Scandinavian coin (3)	65. Tight-lipped (4)
24. Put into words (7)	66. Mouted (5)
25. Dexterity (3)	67. 2nd son of 55 Down (5)
26. Load again (8)	68. Without feet (4)
28. Clyster (5)	69. Stingy person (5)
37. 3rd son of 55 Down (4)	70. Cumulus (4)
38. R. Kipling or W. Blake (4)	71. Depend on (

The new squash generation



Karim El-Mistikawi photo: Ahmed Abdel-Fattah

The Egyptians swept the board in the Arab Junior Championships last week in Riyad, Saudi Arabia, reports Eman Abdel-Moez

The Egyptian under-14 and under-19 teams crushed their opposition with spectacular performances at the Arab Junior Squash Championships in Riyad last week. Their victory was all the more remarkable because the players were unaccompanied by any coaches or other officials of the Egyptian Squash Federation, and only two of the team members, Karim El-Mistikawi and Mohamed Abbas, had experience of international competition.

The under-19 team, Karim El-Mistikawi, Mohamed Abbas, and Ayman Mousen, stormed to 3-0 victories against all four of the opposing teams — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar and Palestine — leaving the Kuwaitis trailing a poor second. Mistikawi shone in the individual event too. After an easy 3-0 defeat of Ali Al-Fashot of Qatar in the first round, he went on to beat Egypt's Ayman Mousen 3-1 in the quarter-final, Qatar's Soud Al-Seleiti 3-0 in the semi-final, and Kuwait's Borak Al-Matari 3-0 in the final.

Each of the under-14s — Omar El-Morshed, Yasser Hababi, and Adham Abdel-Aziz — also won their individual events and the youngsters topped their success with the team title. El-Mistikawi, a promising player from the Misadi Sporting and Yacht Club, is determined to follow in the footsteps of the legion of other squash stars who began their careers in the club. Now mostly playing for other teams, they include Amr and Salma Shabana, Ahmed Barada, Mohamed Medhat, Mai and Rasha Hegazi and Karim El-Mistikawi.

With junior players of this calibre, inspired by senior role models like Ahmed Barada and Ahmed Faizy, the future for Egyptian squash looks bright. The younger players have several years of junior competition left, but for El-Mistikawi, who turns 19 in February, the championship was another achievement to add to his record before he joins Barada and Faizy in the senior ranks.

Mistikawi has improved greatly since Sherif El-Awady took over the supervision of his physical fitness training. The first time he participated in the Arab Junior Championships, two years ago in Bahrain, he won third place after Barada and Faizy, then still juniors. Last year, he participated in the Arab Championships in Kuwait, where he took second place behind fellow countryman Ashraf Hanafi. Now he is in search of a sponsor. If he fails to find someone willing to support his squash career in Egypt, he plans to take advantage of his Swiss passport and accept an offer to play for Switzerland.



Khaled El-Mejdalawi (down) of Wahdat tries to stop a Sudanese attacker

photo: Hosam Diab

Cairo's Arab football summit

Competition is heating up in the Arab League

Champions Cup, as teams fight their way for places in the semifinal. Seven teams are currently in Cairo for the cup, which began on 4 September and ends on Sunday, divided into two groups. Group A consists of Ahli of Egypt, Bida of Algeria and Rafaa of Palestine; Group B includes Helal of Saudi Arabia, Helal of Sudan, Ragaa of Morocco and Wahdat of Jordan.

Egyptian fans at the Cairo Stadium got a thrill in the opening match, when Ahli crushed Bida 5-1. "Gambling on the weakness of their opponents, Ahli kept back some key players, including goalkeeper Ahmed Shobir and top striker Ahmed Felix, for the tougher matches ahead. Hossam Hassan led the attack, but was taken off the pitch shortly after his goal following an injury. But Hassan's absence made no difference as Ahli stormed ahead, seldom losing control of the match.

Mushter Hanafi, who headed in the first minute goal, set up the second for Hossam Hassan's flying header in the 16th minute. By now, with the play remaining largely in their half, Bida were feeling the heat, and were unable to stop Walid Salaheddin's third goal in the 42nd minute.

Bida attempted a comeback, making use of an opening created when Zouani Redha and Teloumi Kamel, coordinating with their teammates,

made a few incursions into Ahli's half. In the 44th minute, Zouani Bilel pulled the score up to 3-1. But another chance at goal, through an opening made by Kamel, was shot wide by Kefra.

The reduction of Bida to 10 men midway through the second half worsened their plight. The Ahli attack continued unabated, with Reda Abdel-Aziz being creative in midfield, motivating the team up front. His chances of scoring were stopped by the Algerian goalkeeper.

Fans' demand for more goals were heeded when Kosheri found the net in the 34th minute, and three minutes later Sayed Youssef blasted in Ahli's fifth goal.

Ahli will meet Rafaa of Palestine for their final Group A match. Entering the competition as the underdogs, the Palestinians have proved themselves a force to be reckoned with, beating Bida 1-0. This was a shocking defeat for Bida, and marked the end of the Algerians' cup chances, taking into account their loss to Ahli. Rafaa's hero was Eya Al-Haja, whose goal in the 40th minute assured his team a place in the semifinals for the first time in their history.

Whatever the outcome of the Rafaa-Ahli encounter, Ahli is also assured of a place in the semifinals. Both teams have two points from one match, whereas Bida has no points from two matches. Because of partial Israeli occupa-

tion and the enforced separation of the West Bank and Gaza, the Palestinians have two football leagues, one for each area. Rafaa are currently Gaza league champions.

"We are in a bad situation and we don't have good training facilities at home, but we are determined to do our best for our country," said Naeef Abdel-Hadi, the Palestinian coach. "What happened today proves that the Palestinians are capable of doing better things if we have encouragement and support, but we need good facilities."

Meanwhile, the picture in Group B is still unclear, and surprises are the order of the day. Defending champions Helal of Saudi Arabia are yet to display the qualities that won them the two previous championships, despite the fact that the team includes a number of internationals including Abigab Linus, Nigeria's Samson Siasia, Abdallah Gabr and Youssef Al-Thani, the Asian footballer of the year.

The Saudi Arabinians played a goalless draw with Ragaa of Morocco in their first Group B match, and then unexpectedly lost 0-1 to their Sudanese namesakes in the second match, despite the red card given to the Sudanese player in the fifth minute of the second half. Although lacking much creative attack from the sides, the Saudis did create some chances at goal for themselves, but they either shot wide, or their shots were blocked by the Sudanese defence

and goalkeeper Rashid Mohamed's inspired saves.

Then, two minutes into injury time, Sudanese Wahaddin Abdulla drove down the right side and struck the unforgettable goal into the Saudi net, a goal that could mark the end to Saudi Arabia's defence of the cup. The injury time drama continued when the Saudis were awarded a penalty, but Rashid Faisal's kick was saved by the goalkeeper. The Sudanese win has driven the Saudis into a corner as they face their next opponents, Wahdat of Jordan.

Wahdat had already defeated Helal of Sudan 3-2 in an earlier match, the Jordanian team's first-ever win in the tournament's history, despite the fact that they have won the Jordanian league five times. Wahdat captain Jihad Abdell-Monim held good team spirit responsible for the win, but did not play down the challenges the team would face in their following matches.

Wahdat later lost 4-0 to Ragaa of Morocco, leaving Ragaa of Morocco at the top of Group B with three points from one win and one draw, Helal of Sudan and Wahdat of Jordan with two points each, while Helal of Saudi Arabia have no points from one win and one loss. With Helal of Sudan to face Ragaa of Morocco and Helal of Saudi Arabia to meet Wahdat of Sudan, the two semi-finalists from Group B were still unknown at the time of writing.

In the Arab League Champions Cup, Egypt's Ahli stormed to a 5-1 victory in the opening match, and the Palestinian and Sudanese teams are proving themselves forces to be reckoned with. Eric Asomugha reports

Emam with a mission

Egypt got the Italian food and the tourists in Shat. But Italy got Hazem Emam. Who made out better, wonders Abeer Anwar

he recalls them yelling. "We've waited to see you for a long time."

While much of their joy was undoubtedly due to the fact that he had joined the team, part of it was that after some mix-ups, he was finally able to get his visa. A press conference was also held where he had the chance to outline his hopes and goals as Italy's newest foreign recruit.

"All this attention made me feel very welcome and comfortable," he stated. "I was also touched by the warmth and sincerity of the greeting I received."

He derived further motivation from the team coach who, said Emam, is very demanding and exacting. "You have to train a lot, and there is no such thing as a player who is unmotivated or not punctual," stated Emam. "Everyone has to be obedient, abide by the rules and the tactics laid down by the coach are not to be disputed. Instructions are to be carried out to the letter, with no excuses allowed."

At first glance these guidelines may seem draconian, but Emam is convinced that they are the key to success. As a result, he is making a point of training hard in order to qualify for a spot on the main team that is going to play in the Italian League next week.

"Despite the strong competition I face, I think I will be able to secure a place on the team," he predicted. Why? "I have proven myself in the friendly matches that I participated in and, according to a survey in an Italian magazine, I was also ranked 74 out of 147 mid-fielders."

Success, however, has not gone to Emam's head. "I still miss the players in Egypt and the strategy we used in a match," he said. His contract does offer him the right to play on the Egyptian national team during its important matches. The Egyptian Football Federation must notify Udinese two weeks before the event in order for Emam to be able to play.

"The national team includes a number of players — such as Khaled El-Gamoudi, Walid Salah and Sabry Abdell-Sattar — who are better than I am, and who can more than make up for me during my absence," said the young pro.

But he is not fazed. Upon his arrival, Emam was cheered by the team and the coach. "At last, you are here,"

Modern-day Miss Marple

Before lawn bowling there was croquet, which, discovers Nashwa Abdel-Tawab, is not just for grandparents anymore

During those lazy, hazy, crazy days of summer, what's someone to do for some fun. Given the stifling heat that grips Cairo during the summer months, arguably the best option would be sit by the pool or in an air-conditioned location. But this can often get boring, as can shooting pool or going bowling if done too frequently.

This was the quandary that gripped my family and I recently, until we stumbled on a sport that we had never really considered playing before — croquet.

While at the club one evening, my family, friends and I found a shady, quiet spot by the croquet field. This area in the club is noted for being particularly removed and quiet but, to our surprise, instead of the usual spraying of senior citizens that usually retire there for some rest and repose, we found a group of boisterous youths avidly playing croquet. The game, it seems, has come a long way from the days of Agatha Christie's Miss Marple, who would sit eating cucumber and watercress sandwiches while sipping a spot of tea.

Always one to try out something new, I encouraged the people to me to give it a try. A half-hour match quickly became a two-hour heated battle of wits and patience as each of us tried to outdo the other. And although we didn't know anything about the game, we quickly caught on after two veteran croquet enthusiasts summed it up in a nutshell: get the ball through the hoops until you reach the wooden peg at the end of the field.

This is perhaps the most alluring thing about croquet — it is a forgiving game and does not require any special training or particularly strenuous pre-season work out. In other words, don't worry about the sit-ups.

In fact, the game requires a minimal amount of strength, but a lot of skill and concentration, and has a history as rich and colourful as the mallets used to play it. Croquet originated back in 13th century France, but gained fame and popularity in the 1800s in England and the US, before it was overshadowed by lawn tennis.

Players use long-handled mallets to tap the balls through a series of hoops until they reach a wooden peg driven into the earth.

It may sound simple, but concentration and control are really the name of the game. At first, we couldn't grip our mallets properly. But with a little patience, perseverance and beginner's luck, we caught on and were able to control our shots and passes. It is important to remember that this is not golf, so driving the ball as hard as you can is not only not the way to play, it is down-right stupid and will make you look quite ridiculous.

Moreover, given that every shot requires a measure of planning until you are able to reach the peg, concentrating on the shot at hand will help you block out those same daily stresses that prompt you to think of playing a game like croquet in the first place. Croquet fields can be found in most major sports clubs around Cairo.

Edited by Inas Mazhar



Hazem Emam (left) struggling for the ball

What's new in museums

Educational programme

AT THE beginning of the school year this September, a new programme intended to introduce students to archaeology will begin at the Egyptian Museum. This programme is the first of its kind in the Egyptian Museum. It aims to increase children's historical and artistic awareness of Egyptian heritage. The programme consists of two parts. The first will offer students a free tour of the museum, giving them an overview of Egypt's history. The second organises archaeological courses where pupils will study the history of the pharaohs and their artistic styles. A workshop equipped with sculpture tools and coloured clay will also be available to help develop children's art skills.

The programme will be held in the museum's back garden in a tent, furnished with desks and chairs provided by the German Heinz Zayden Association.

Archaeological and art books will be provided on shelves, and replicas of important Pharaonic objects will also be displayed in the tent. "These replicas will give children the opportunity to view the antiquities more closely," said Sayed Hassan, head of the papyri department in the Egyptian Museum. Courses will be held in the museum three times a week until qualified teachers can be trained, after which they will take place every day. Presently, teachers of the museum's school for children are curators who have taken training courses enabling them to teach Egyptian history in a way that children will understand. Art specialists will instruct children in the pharaoh's artistic styles and help them sculpt some of the statues and interesting artefacts.

The courses are free of charge for all pupils from 5 to 16 years old.

Franco-Egyptian ties

NEXT year France and Egypt will celebrate 200 years of cultural ties. Two antiquities exhibitions will be held in Paris to commemorate the occasion. The first exhibition will include Fatimid artifacts taken from the Islamic and Coptic museums. The second will consist of different objects displaying Egyptian history both past and present.

Coptic Museum issues guide

THE COPTIC Museum in Old Cairo is issuing a new edition of the museum's guide. The book contains descriptions of the most important items on display at the museum and information on Coptic civilisation and asceticism in Christianity. The catalogue includes more than 50 coloured photographs of items on display at the museum. The price of the guide will be LE20.

Archaeological lectures

THE COPTIC Museum, along with the Coptic Cultural Centre, began a series of archaeological lectures this summer directed toward increasing cultural and archaeological awareness. The lectures provide information regarding new archaeological discoveries, restoration projects and maintenance of antiquities. Different archaeological topics will be discussed at the monthly lectures held in the restoration building in the Coptic Museum.

Revolution restoration

THE RESTORATION of the Revolution Palace in El-Gezira is now under way. Plans are to convert it to a museum and opening it to the public next year. The palace's windows, walls, grounds, and furniture will be restored to their original design.

The museum will exhibit photos and information about the 1952 Revolution and its free officers. Its furniture will also be displayed exactly as it was during the 1952 revolution.

The palace museum will contain 26 rooms and suites overlooking the Nile on El-Gezira Island where most of the free officers' meetings and the revolution's tribunal hearings were held.

Arabic calligraphy exhibited

AFTER many years of neglect at Wegala El-Ghouri, a collection of unique Arabic calligraphy works will be exhibited at Zienab Khatoun house near Al-Azhar.

The collection consists of 80 works of calligraphy by celebrated Egyptian and Turkish calligraphers dating back to the 16th and 19th centuries.

This collection is the first to be contributed to the new Arabic calligraphy museum planned for Zienab Khatoun house, one of Egypt's famous Mameluke houses.

A coloured booklet including a list of objects on display, information on scientific studies of Arabic calligraphy and its artistic trends will also be provided in the museum.

Compiled by Nevine El-Aref

Passing through the "Womb Rock", exploring a cave, and a picnic in the Coloured Canyon for today's adventure travellers

photos: Sherif Sonbol

Canyon capers

Whether you go by camel, 4x4 or on foot, the Coloured Canyon should not be missed. **Sherif Sonbol**, camera in hand, takes a hike

It's hard to live in or visit Egypt without developing even the most marginal interest in T E Lawrence. There's a touch of the romantic in his exploits — riding across the desert on a horse, camel or motorcycle, dressed in flowing *galabiya*. Are there any greater pleasures in life?

Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on one's personality and physical prowess, most of us opt for the comfort of a five-star hotel — sitting by the pool sipping a cold one while basking in the sun. For those with a more adventurous streak, the beaches and resorts, however, just don't cut the mustard. This type of outward-bound traveller needs something more — the rush of adrenalin through their veins as they climb the smooth surface of a cliff, bathe millions of gallons of water on a raging river, sojourn through the desert or take their chances while eating from a roadside stall. The Coloured Canyon, just north of the Red Sea town of Nuweiba, offers both kinds of traveller a pleasant middle ground. It's sufficiently hot in Sinai to make the excursion less-than-comfortable, but not so physically daunting that it requires someone with the stamina of an athlete on steroids.

Located 5km north of Nuweiba on the Cairo-Nuweiba Road, the canyon is a sight to behold. Nestled inside are a variety of beautifully coloured monoliths, shaped by hundreds of thousands of years of erosion by water and sand. The colours are dazzling, and are preserved in all their pigmented glory by the fact that the sun has not been able to penetrate the narrow walls of the canyon.

Climbing through the canyon, the hiker is forced to pass through the "Womb Rock", a narrow hole that forces all but the most slender of tourists to turn back. Countless tourists, not aware of this fact, have managed to get themselves uncomfortably lodged in the hole as a result.

This tour was made possible by the courtesy of INMO Diving Centre in Dahab

Travellers in Egypt

She who really understood

Lucie Duff-Gordon stayed in Egypt for seven years. Elizabeth Rodenbeck traces her life and letters

She was a lively and intelligent girl, carefully educated by her parents — her father, John Austin, was a professor of jurisprudence and her mother was conversant in several languages — and married, at 18, to Sir Alexander Duff-Gordon who held a modest job in the treasury of the British government.

Though enjoying a rewarding life, Lucie looked thin, ill and, by the time she was thirty, her hair was growing grey. She had contracted tuberculosis — in those days called consumption — and came to Egypt hoping the gentle lifestyle would slow the deadly progress of the disease.

A lady's maid, Sally, accompanied her from England and Lucie soon acquired a young Egyptian named Omar Abu Al-Halaweh as dragoon, cook and general factotum. He was to prove resourceful, honest and utterly devoted, staying with his mistress day in, day out for the seven remaining years of her life.

Lucie fell in love with the country and the people. In 1864 she decided to settle down. At that time Luxor consisted of a collection of ramshackle houses and mud-huts built on top of the rubble which buried the temple of Luxor. Only the heads of statues and the tops of columns were visible. Here Lucie and her household settled down for the winter. "The view all round my house is magnificent on every side, over the Nile in front facing north-west, and over a splendid range of green and distant orange buff hills to the south-east, where I have a spacious covered terrace," she wrote.

Lucie was a dusty old place, but Lucie does not seem to have been particularly fussy. There were no roads and the railway only

reached as far south as Minya, so Luxor was the major stopping off place for all Nile traffic. Not a week went by without a visit from some traveller or other but Lucie depended mainly on her local friends and neighbours for companionship. As she visited the people of Luxor and the nearby villages she "contrived to see more of family life than many Europeans who have lived here for years... I am living here a very quiet, dreamy sort of life in hot Thebes, visiting a little among my neighbours and learning a little Arabic from a most sweet, gentle young Sheykh who preaches on Fridays in the mosque of Luxor (the Mosque of Abu El-Haggag which still perches on its pile of earth in the middle of the temple). I wish I could draw his soft brown face and graceful, brown-draped figure," she wrote.

Then there was Mustafa Aga, the English consul, Seleem Effendi, the magistrate and many farmers and neighbours with whom Lucie made friends. She tucked up her sleeves and dipped her bread into the common dish and ate with them and smoked her pipe with them; and as they got to know her, they started to trust her and confide in her. "Only you in all of Egypt know the people and understand what goes on..." observed a visiting Egyptian doctor.

"Other Europeans know absolutely nothing beyond appearances; only you have inspired confidence enough to learn the truth." The first volume of Lucie's letters to her family was published in 1865, and went through three editions within a year. She described the activities of Mohamed Ali's grandson Ismail who, when he became Pasha in 1863, embarked on a radical programme of modernisation and drained the country's resources. She was a daily witness to the rapaciousness of the tax collectors and the cruelty of the press gangs who dragged able-bodied men off for forced labour. "In Egypt we are eaten up with taxes," she wrote. "The system of wholesale extortion and spoliation has reached a point beyond which it would be difficult to go... I grieve still more over the daily anguish of the poor *fellahin* (peasants) who are forced to take the bread from the mouths of their starving families and to eat it while toiling for the private profit of one man."

Alick, her husband, came to visit her in the autumn of 1864 but Lucie was never to see her mother or her little daughter, Rainie, again. With Omar's help she bought and equipped her own boat, and piled up and down the Nile hoping vainly for a remission from her coughing and breathlessness. Though she often bravely wrote that her health was better, that the heat was doing her good, she also wrote: "I who worship Amun Ra, love to feel him in his glory," as she slipped gradually downhill. By January 1867 she was too weak to walk and had to be carried in a chair by four men.

Lucie was shocked and diverted by the arrival of her 18-year-old son Maurice who, like his mother, loved Egypt. During her last days Lucie Duff-Gordon and her faithful crew sailed gently down to Bradashin near Memphis, where she wrote, "My two reises (skipper) are strong and tender and Omar is as admirable as ever. I could not be better cared for anywhere than by my good and loving crew." She died on 9 July, 1869.

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She died on 9 July, 1869.

There were no roads and the railway only

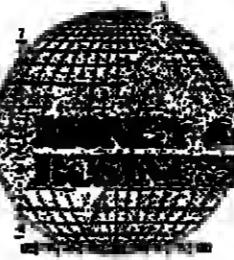
reached as far south as Minya, so Luxor was the major stopping off place for all Nile traffic.

Not a week went by without a visit from some traveller or other but Lucie depended mainly on her local friends and neighbours for

Drawing attention to South Africa's market

MAJOR companies in South Africa expressed their willingness to take part in the Cairo Economic Summit to be held in November. In response, the Egyptian Embassy made several contacts with businessmen, companies and organisations to ensure an effective participation of South African companies. The Egyptian Embassy also contacted Nelson Mandela's office and his deputy as well as the different ministries and the chamber of commerce to guarantee a high turnout to the summit. South Africa's participation will not only result in bilateral agreements, but will upgrade commercial exchange between the two countries.

MONEY & BUSINESS



Minister of trade to open seminar on investments

AHMED Guweil, minister of trade, will open a seminar on investment in Moscow. An exhibition for Egyptian products will be held at the same time and place as the seminar. Guweil's visit is aimed at promoting Egyptian products. Ahmed Shiha, head of the Egyptian Society for Marketing Technology said that the visit paid by government officials confirms that the Egyptian government is keen to open access for Egyptian products and to cooperate with the private sector. Applying the free market policy will help Egypt regain the markets it had previously lost as Egyptian exports to Russia decreased from \$800mn to \$47mn over the past few years.

Re-inaugurating the library of the National Bank of Egypt

IN LINE with a comprehensive development programme and after strenuous travail that lasted for about ten months, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) re-inaugurated its specialised library located on the 28th floor of its tower which overlooks the Nile.

The library comprises about 5,188 Arabic and English books, covering economic, banking and monetary studies. This is in addition to local and international specialised periodicals.

The first inauguration of the library was con-

comitant to the establishment of NBE in 1898, as it was the premier library specialized in monetary, banking and economic subjects. At the turn of the sixties, the library became part of the Central Bank of Egypt which commenced its operations; since then, as an independent entity, NBE re-established another library covering all different fields of humanitarian knowledge, particularly banking and economic fields. Piecemeal expansion and diversification of its contents were conducive to division thereof into two libraries; one con-

taining literary, religious and political books and the other economic and banking subjects.

In line with NBE's strategy tilted towards modernising and equipping the bank with state-of-the-art computer technology and up-to-date techniques of the Information Revolution, the management of NBE had decided to break through to the twenty-first century with a library basically depending on an advanced database and sound information system.

Utilising the computer system in the NBE library is regarded as a great progress that

streamlines the process of finding books. Furthermore, the library can be linked with information as well as scientific research centres, universities, besides local and international scientific libraries via the internet. Accordingly, new vistas are open now to exchange researches and be acquainted with the latest developments in banking industry, a far-fetched idea before gaining access to the said system.

To pursue the illuminating and cultural role that NBE assumed since its establishment, the

management has decided to dedicate some books to other libraries to provide researchers and scholars with research materials.

Such an achievement is regarded as a great contribution by the bank not only to its staff but also to other researchers in Egypt as well as the Arab world, as they have an access now to the latest local and international studies conducted in the fields of banking and economy. It is worth mentioning that the library is open for indoor reading during the official working hours of the bank.

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THE IGEDO International Fashion Fair not only puts a strong emphasis on its own marketing efforts for fashion and fairs but it has also awarded the International Marketing Prize 20 times. This award is given alternately to manufacturing and trading companies every year, whose marketing concepts and success are exemplary and exemplary for the whole industry.

The prize winner for 1996 is Gerry Weber International AG in Halle/Westphalia. Gerhard Weber, chairman of the board, received the prize from the Lady Mayoress of the District Capital Düsseldorf, Mrs. Marlies Smeets, at the Fashion Forum on 1 September 1996. This event was followed by a fashion show, featuring the group's labels Gerry Weber, Taifun, Samoon and Aigner Ladies' Fashion.

Growth — as opposed to the trend Especially in times of crisis, tailor-made marketing concepts are of decisive importance for the success of a label. This is why the Igodo Prize is not awarded for short-term success or spectacular highlights but for continuity of concepts and implementation. A panel of experts spends two years on intensive market research in order to select each prize winner.

As for fashion, the right mixture counts in

marketing. The success enjoyed by the Gerry Weber Group in the past few years is also evident. In times where the industry is battling against an indifference towards fashion and sales slumps, the fashion producer from Eastern Westphalia surprised with front-page headlines in the financial press such as 'Successful because of slumps', 'Growth - opposed to the trend' or 'Better than the industry'.

The Westphalian Group with international operations is represented in over 20 countries. In 1995 the Gerry Weber Group sold approximately 6 million garments worth DM403mn. Operating results amounted to DM44.6mn. Hence, a 2 per cent increase in sales generated a 25 per cent increase in pretax profits. Now over 40 per cent of the total sales are made outside Germany.

In 1995 exports rose to DM162mn. Gerry Weber fashion is sold primarily to the neighbouring Western European states, above all the Benelux states, Scandinavia and Great Britain.

Gerry Weber also realised and developed the market potential in South East Asia in time. The luxury brand Aigner is particularly successful in the Far East. This year the Gerry Weber Group expects to achieve a further 4 per cent increase in turnover and a

2-digit earnings growth.

To secure future growth, Gerry Weber International AG is to be operated as a holding in the future. To this end, Gerry Weber plans to establish a separate limited company for handling operations, Gerry Weber Life Style Fashion GmbH. The core labels, Gerry Weber, Taifun, Aigner Ladies' Fashion and Samoon will be concentrated and reinforced by setting up individual independent companies.

Individuality also characterises the new 'shop-in-shop system' of the Gerry Weber group. By this Gerry Weber understands not only shop fitting but above all a service package for his partners in the trade.

The right product, at the right time, at the right price

Like any big success, Gerry Weber's marketing is based on a simple and therefore logical concept: the right product at the right time and at the right price.

The product

From the beginning Gerry Weber International AG relied on a multi-label strategy which allows a far more flexible response to changing markets and emerging niches. The product policy within the group is designed for each label to gain a profile in its respective competitive environment. The

highly diversified market segments addressed guarantee that the consolidated business develops with a high degree of continuity.

The price

To ensure an attractive price/quality ratio long term, the Gerry Weber Group started developing foreign markets for manufacturing and sourcing at a very early stage. Now over 90 per cent of the group output is produced abroad. Continuity is also guaranteed quality-wise by a strict QC system at home and abroad.

The time

When launching the individual collections it only took Gerry Weber AG a short time to position each new brand label in the market. The 21st Fashion Marketing Prize winner fully supports the 4-season fashion concept, which was initiated by Igodo and will be put into practice as of 1997. In this crucial aspect, Gerry Weber AG has also proved to be a trendsetter: as early as autumn/winter 1996/97 the Gerry Weber, Taifun and Samoon collections will be streamlined and re-organised as monthly lines.

Today, Gerry Weber, the group's core label, is associated with high-quality fashion by over 50 per cent of female buyers (acc. to HFU survey).

Couture, courage and marketing



THE BIGGEST and most multifarious trade fair of the association of consumer-goods fairs that make up the Frankfurt International Fair was given a new structure orientated towards the specific needs of trade buyers.

Anthology Presents — International Trade Fair for Arts and Crafts and Gift Articles — replaced the former, long-standing Trade Fair for Art and Handicrafts, Gifts at Tendence '96 — International Frankfurt Autumn Fair — held from 24 to 28 August 1996. All 1,430 exhibitors were given new stand positions in Halls 5, 6 and 7 of Frankfurt Fair and Exhibition Centre.

The basis for the creation of a transparent world of gifts is a new, target-group orientated product arrangement. Clear product presentations in four segments on seven exhibition-hall floors enabling trade buyers to find what they are looking for and place their orders with greater precision than ever before.

To this end, the current, very heterogeneous product segments were concentrated in transparent areas comprising bundles of similar products. Account will also be taken of existing trade structures whenever possible.

The biggest and most heterogeneous group is made up of exhibitors offering international gift articles and particularly design-orientated gifts. In future, Hall 5.0 will provide the setting for importers and exhibitors with folk art and figures/statuettes, plus the national joint stands from Austria, Italy and Great Britain.

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25/4/1417 AH 9/9/1996, profits of transactions carried out in 1417 AH ending 15 August will be distributed in

1 Local Currency

- Investment accounts for no less than two years

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مكتبة من الأصل

US effort
continues

Settlements
expanded

ISRAEL Defense Minister Mordechai Rabin signed a plan to hand over control of a West Bank town to the PLO, ending the 10-year-old dispute between the two groups and paving the way for a peace agreement.

News of Monday's

agreement, described as

the first to be

signed by the

two sides

in nearly 10 years,

was welcomed

as a breakthrough

in the peace process.

But the deal

was not without

criticism.

Opposition

MPs said

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